Caucasian Russia

"Where Russian blood is shed, there is the Earth"

Lev Prozorov

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The Caucasus issue has always been one of the main trump cards in the propaganda arsenal of Russia's enemies – for two centuries now, the West has been accusing our country of 'colonialism', 'imperial expansion' and 'the conquest of the Caucasus'.

The renowned historian, author of the bestsellers *The Ancient Gods of Rus'*,
Svyatoslav the Great and *Evpatiy Kolovrat*, leaves no stone unturned in refuting these accusations, irrefutably proving that there is every reason to regard our Slavic ancestors as one of the indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus, and the Caucasus itself as Russian land since time immemorial.

- Lev Prozorov
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Lev Prozorov, Caucasian
Rus
Where Russian blood has been shed, there lies Russian soil

TO LAMBODARE-YADREY, WHO DANCES AT DAWN, BRUSHING THE DIAMONDS OF THE STARS FROM THE SKY.

TO COLONEL BUDANOV.

TO ALL SLAVIC SOLDIERS WHO FOUGHT ON THE CAUCASUS FRONT: FROM THE SIEGE OF PARTAVA AND THE BATTLE OF ARDEBIL TO THE ASSAULT ON SAMASHEK, THE CAPTURE AND DEFENCE OF GROZNY DEDICATED TO

In lieu of an epigraph

Russians, do not trust your enemies… where Russian blood has been shed, there lies Russian soil.

'VK'

A swarthy commissar, as black as a rook,
Declared: 'Gasseya' – from here to there… No,
Mother Russia, You are where, shoulder to
shoulder, Two of Your children stood!
Our blood flows in all the rivers of Europe, In
half the rivers of Asia.
Where the Huns spilled it, where the fierce
Goths, Where the cunning and vile Greeks.
Who said that Ukraine and Lithuania are not part
of Rus', That Yerevan and Ashgabat are not part
of Rus',
If in these lands, their ranks closed together,
Hundreds of fallen Rus' men lie?!
Rus' is alive! The eagle's flight beneath the
heavens Brings us glad tidings:
Let no one say, 'Rus' was. It shall be forever! For
it is here!

Ozar Voron

Introduction, or Why We Russians Are Rarely Criticised

An ancient festival. How Russians are ashamed of themselves, whilst others take pride in who they are. Our strange anniversaries. Dead ends – both imagined and real. The historian's legacy.
'Where did it all come from…'. The two sides of a counterfeit coin. That's us.

Ivan, who remembers nothing

of his lineage. A proverb

We are lazy and uncurious A.S.

Pushkin

I shall begin from afar – from places far removed from both Russia and the Caucasus. From Japan. I saw it on the television – in one of the cities of the Land of the Rising Sun, they were celebrating a temple festival. People were marching solemnly down the street, clad in shoes woven from ropes, felt caps and strange, loose-fitting robes. The correspondent explained that the festival is celebrated annually by the 'parishioners'
of a Shinto[1] shrine dating back to… the 8th century. And the revellers' robes reproduce the costumes of that distant era with archaeological accuracy.

And I looked at the smiling, copper-coloured faces and thought that here, no doubt, were clerks from famous corporations walking about in ancient garb, not in the least afraid that appearing on the street in such an 'unprofessional' manner would spell the end of their careers, and their important bosses, who are equally unconcerned about their professional reputations, or even dashing yakuza lads, not in the least worried that 'real lads won't get it'. And for some reason, followers of the Buddha's teachings are not at all inclined to protest against the temple and rituals that emerged long before

the first preachers of Gautama's teachings set foot on the ancient islands of Yamato.

Now, reader, try to picture this with me: a procession somewhere in Novgorod to mark, say, Perun's Day. A prominent businessman (Mr Bryntsalov, for example), a government official, a 'brother' dressed in Rus' attire—let's say not from the 8th, but from the 10th century (and not in those garish, folk-art-style 'à la Rus' outfits with sarafans and balalaikas, but in carefully, lovingly reconstructed authentic garments of that era). Orthodox Christians, peacefully tucking crosses under their clothes and marching in the general ranks, should not be accused of 'idolatry' and 'Satanism'.

The Russian people, my people, are often criticised. And often – without good reason. Because, let's say, I do not believe in the 'laziness' of the people of Ermak, Khabarov and Dezhnev, who built an empire stretching from the Baltic to the Pacific; the people of Korolev and Gagarin, who were the first to venture into space. It was not the Russians who invented the concept of the 'siesta', for instance; whereas for the Germans it gave rise to ballads about blissful Schlaraffia, with rivers of beer and mountains of sausages, and for the French to tales of the beautiful Cocagne, for us it was confined to amusing sayings – on an island, they say, 'On Buyan, rivers of milk, shores of jelly, a roasted ox walks about, a knife sharpened in its side.' And all manner of simpletons—Hans, Jacques and Jack—from European fairy tales are by no means any more hard-working than our own Emelya. As for other shortcomings—well, the Japanese, for example, drink far more than we do.

But there is one shortcoming for which, in my view, we are not criticised enough. It is a sort of astonishing forgetfulness, a lack of seriousness towards our past – and, ultimately, towards our national essence, our identity and our culture. I'm not talking about liberals or, say, communists – no one expects anything from them. But how are we to make sense of, for example, a statement by one of the newspapers that call themselves 'Russian' and 'nationalist', claiming that a fondness for national dress and traditional appearance is, apparently, 'Asian nonsense'? Well, they've certainly enlightened us. We shall now be in the know that Hermann Göring, who posed for the camera in Bavarian shorts with patterned braces and a flippant Tyrolean hat with a feather, turns out to be an 'Asian'. And the actor Sean Connery, who wore a Scottish kilt with a clan tartan when he was knighted, is apparently an 'Asian' too. And

the Texan congressman, striding purposefully up the steps of the White House in a cowboy Stetson and an antrie suit, is, of course, an ‘Asian’.

Excuse me, but can you, dear reader, imagine any of our actors (let’s not even mention politicians)—not Kharatyan or Gaft, of course, but at least Domogarov or Zhigunov—appearing in a ‘place of authority’ wearing a kosovorotka?

‘Not serious’… ‘A farce’… Oh, how serious we are. In a Hawaiian shirt and shorts – yes, that’s fine. But in a kosovorotka – ‘Am I a clown?!’.

To be honest, the reverence for their people’s historical past among Western ‘Asians’ and ‘clowns’ sometimes takes on rather strange forms. Rudyard Kipling – the very same man, incidentally, whom his compatriot and contemporary Chesterton reproached for what amounted to rootless cosmopolitanism, claiming he viewed his native island ‘from the window of a passenger carriage’ – – in *The Gifts of the Fairies* and *The Sack from the Hills of Puck*, lovingly unfolds before his readers a gallery of ancestors, featuring both a Stone Age British shepherd and a Roman legionary. And he does not care in the slightest that the English Anglo-Saxons themselves are not actually descendants of the Britons or the Romans. Even more astonishing is the pride of the Anglo-Saxons – including those across the Atlantic – in the exploits of the legendary King Arthur, one of which, incidentally, is said to be his personal slaughter at the Battle of Mount Badon of nine hundred… Anglo-Saxons.

Or, for instance, the celebrations in France marking the victory of Vercingetorix, leader of the rebellious Gauls, over the Roman legions, and the monument erected to commemorate the occasion – yet today’s French are, perhaps, no less the descendants of the vanquished Romans than of those tall, blue-eyed rebels. And as for claiming, in the spirit of our intelligentsia, that the Gauls were savages who practised human sacrifice, whilst the Romans brought them the advanced culture of the Mediterranean, I would strongly advise you, dear reader, against doing so should you find yourself at these celebrations. The French are a passionate people, and experiencing their love and respect for their ancestors first-hand might not be good for your health. As you can see, even the most progressive and civilised nations are not ashamed of their past, and sometimes are not averse to ‘embellishing’ it at someone else’s expense.

But you know – there are even stranger and more grotesque things. For example, when we celebrate the ‘Day of the Beginnings of Slavic Writing’ in honour of

Saint Cyril. The very same Saint Cyril, whose hagiography states in black and white that the future saint saw, in Chersonesos, an ancient city not far from present-day Sevastopol, two books (!) written in 'Rus' script' [2] . Naturally, representatives of a peculiar – and, unfortunately, not insignificant – section of our academic community, for whom any thought of the Slavs' past achievements evokes a kind of superstitious fear, jumped at the chance to declare that 'Rus' should be understood as 'Gothic'. The fact that
the term 'Rus' appears in all 26 (!) manuscripts of the hagiography, many of which were compiled far beyond Russia's borders – in Moravia, Serbia and Bulgaria – does not trouble these 'scholars', nor does the fact that the Goths are mentioned in the hagiography by their own name. After all, if one were to write that these are, in fact, *Russian* script, 'the real lads wouldn't get it'!

And what about the '300th anniversary of the Russian fleet', which was recently celebrated with great fanfare? We are to understand that Askold and Dir swam all the way to Constantinople across the Black Sea, just as the Russian Pomors reached Spitsbergen-Grumant, and the Cossack explorers made it as far as Alaska and California.

But the crowning glory of it all is our marvellous Defender of the Fatherland Day. It was all well and good back in Soviet times when it was called Soviet Army Day – clear and honest. But how are we to interpret today's name – does it mean that the first defender of the Fatherland was an army created less than a hundred years ago during and for the civil war, a fratricidal bloodbath, and consisting of deserters, Chinese, Latvians and Central Asian Muslims? Personally, I must confess, dear reader, that I find it hard to see this as anything other than a contemptuous spit on the graves of the heroes of the Brusilov Offensive and the 'Varyag', Shipka and Sevastopol, Borodino and Poltava, the conquerors of Kazan and Siberia, the warriors of the Kulikovo Field and the Battle on the Ice, and the warriors of Svyatoslav the Brave and Oleg the Prophet.

Let us, dear reader, call a spade a spade. We Russians, for the most part, do not respect our past, our history, our roots. And that means we do not respect ourselves either. And anyone who does not respect themselves is respected by no one – that is, in fact, a well-known truth. And we must not listen to those who have not yet recovered from the fever of perestroika and continue to ramble on about the 'dead end
'special path'', 'universal human values' and the 'main path of development'. It was precisely when we were chasing these mirages – whether

whether under Olga and Vladimir, under Peter the Great or Michael Gorbachev, we found ourselves at a dead end, and getting out of it each time required great, very great effort – and sometimes even bloodshed. But the times when we began, little by little, to remember that Russia is, after all, Russia, and that Russians are Russians, and that there is nothing shameful in that, – that was when the times came when people, whilst still not loving us, began to respect us, and life in the country became more or less bearable – under the Moscow tsars, under Nicholas Pavlovich and Alexander Alexandrovich, under Stalin. Everything derogatory that could possibly be said about the latter has already been said; I shall merely note that under him, a country lying in ruins after the Civil War became a power capable of breaking the back of two of the strongest empires in world history, and the foundations of the space programme were laid. By contrast, under his detractors, the former superpower and the people who had built it were left practically without a single bullet, and everything that Hitler had intended to do – as we were once taught at school – was carried out against them.

And if you, the reader, ever wish to understand why, say, in Japan – where, within an area the size of the Ural Range, albeit devoid of its raw materials, there are as many people as live in the whole of Russia; in a country where there have never been scientists of such international renown as Kapitsa, Kurchatov or Korolev, and where, in the days of Mendeleev and Pavlov, there were no scientists at all; in a country which is perhaps the only one in the whole world that can claim to have suffered more than Russia during the last world war; yet the standard of living there remains unattainably high for us, whilst its industrialists are confidently capturing the markets of Russia, Europe and America – remember where we began this conversation. A good life is impossible without respect for oneself, one's country and one's people – and that means paying respectful attention to one's past. I emphasise: *respectful* attention, not a monkey-like nit-picking for flaws and shortcomings.

I could hardly put it better than the remarkable Russian historian Ivan Yegorovich Zabelin, and so I shall simply quote his words here: 'It is well known that the ancients, particularly the Greeks and Romans, knew how to nurture heroes… This skill lay solely in the fact that they knew how to portray the leading figures of their history not only in historical truth, but also in poetic truth. They

knew how to value the merits of heroes; they knew how to distinguish the ‘golden truth’ and the reality of these merits from the mundane lies and filth in which every person inevitably lives and is always, to a greater or lesser extent, tainted by them. They were able to distinguish in these merits not only their real and, so to speak, useful essence, but also their ideal essence—that is, the historical idea of the accomplished deed and feat—which was essential and elevated the hero’s character to the level of an ideal.

Our Russian approach to the study of history stands at a completely different, indeed the opposite, end to that of the ancients. As is well known, we are very zealous only in denying and denouncing our own history, and we dare not even entertain the thought of any ideal characters. We do not allow for the ideal in our own history. What ideals did we ever have, let alone heroes! Our entire history is a dark realm of ignorance, barbarism, superstition, slavery and so on. There is no point in being hypocritical: this is what the vast majority of educated Russians think. It is clear that such a history cannot foster heroes, and that it must have a stifling effect on the ideals of youth. The very best thing a young man can do with such a history is to remain completely unaware of whether it even exists. Most do just that. But is it not precisely for this reason that the majority of the educated Russian population faces, perhaps quite justly, the reproach that they have no firm ground beneath their feet, that they lack a sense of their own historical national consciousness, and are therefore, both intellectually and morally, blown hither and thither by the winds of the moment?

Indeed, national history always serves as a firm support and unshakeable foundation for national consciousness and self-knowledge.’

Russian history, too, is not neglected by God in this respect. There are, or ought to be, within it noble ideas and ideals, as well as enlightened and highly moral heroes and builders of society. We need only bear in mind the true observation of the ancient writers that ‘the fame and renown of a people or an individual in history depend not at all on their glorious or inglorious deeds, nor on the nature of their historical exploits, but depends entirely on the art and skill—or even the intention—of writers to portray the deeds of a people in a glorious light or to belittle them, just as they do with the deeds of historical figures’.

As we can see, the grotesque distortions of our collective consciousness did not appear yesterday, nor even in Soviet times. I am inclined to trace them back to the era when our ancestors—once demigods and objects of boundless veneration by their descendants—were transformed by a new religion into dull barbarians who worshipped lifeless pieces of wood; by comparing Olga amongst the pagans to a pearl in dung, the chronicler had no idea that he was laying the foundations for the mindset that would prevail amongst educated Russians ten centuries later. Only those are worthy who wish to bring Rus' into line with the latest 'universal' hierarchy, trampling underfoot and cursing the memory of their past, their path, and their ancestors. These are the progressive, forward-thinking people, the 'pearls'. The rest are filth. And the events I write about in this book are the best proof that I am right. Not a single one of them – with the sole exception, which I shall mention specifically – made it into the chronicles, even though nearly half took place during the lifetime of that very 'Saint' Olga herself – for these were, after all, the sorrows and valiant deeds of those wretched pagans,
'filth'!

We must put an end to this tradition. It is high time we truly learnt from the West – not in terms of how it views Russia, but in terms of the ability to look at ourselves and our own past, our national identity.

At the same time, of course, it is advisable not to fall into the other extreme, claiming that the Rus' are the most ancient people on earth, and generously populating with ancestors places they never even dreamt of visiting. Asov and Klein, Petukhov and Petrukhin – these are two sides of the same coin, and it is no coincidence that they sit side by side on the bookshelves of our shops. The works of 'patriots' searching for the Rus in Palestine – the 'Scorched Camp' – or in Indonesia, on whose islands the Papuan Rodda-Veda tribe dwells – allow authors to don the robes of champions of 'scientific objectivity', joyfully informing the reader that the Tiverians and Ulichi were Turks, the Drevlians were Goths, the Polans and the Northerners were Iranians, the Dregovichs and the Krivichs were Balts, the Ilmen Slovenes were Karelians, and the Rus' were Scandinavians (as for where the Slavs came from on the Russian Plain – that, dear reader, is not for me to say; you should ask these gentlemen). For their part, it is precisely the latter who, through their works, ensure the lion's share of the former's popularity, allowing them to claim that professional historians are, without exception, 'Russophobes' – for there are plenty of examples – and therefore, historical science need not be

. And neither side goes to much trouble with evidence or logic, substituting labels for them. Don't believe in the 'Book of Veles' or the Russian Etruscans? Well, you're a 'Russophobe',
a 'Jewish Freemason' and a 'cosmopolitan', the 'patriots' gleefully declare – and the debate is over. Don't believe that the Varangians and Rus' mentioned in the chronicles were Scandinavians, who, in their swift boats, crossed the impenetrable pine forests and damp oak groves of Eastern Europe, conquering lands three times the size of Scandinavia itself, only to vanish without a trace amongst the conquered in the second generation? Then you are
a 'chauvinist', 'anti-Semite' [3]and 'obsessed with an inferiority complex' – mutter the 'academics' through gritted teeth, once again putting an end to the discussion before it has even begun.

This touching duet is by no means a recent phenomenon. As far back as the 18th century, a respectable German, G.Z. Miller, appeared in Russia, describing how the valiant Scandinavians conquered the savage Slavs, bringing them absolutely all the benefits of culture, civilisation and statehood. When it was pointed out to him that the sources on which he relied were no more reliable than the fairy tale about Prince Bova, Herr Miller was taken aback for just a second: 'Bova? Never heard of him…' – but immediately, with his former aplomb, he would gallop on: '…but that name is similar to that of Balder's brother, Bous, in Saxo Grammaticus – here is yet another confirmation of Scandinavian influence.' Science, indeed!

You may laugh, reader, yet even to this day, certain domestic (!) historians continue to regard Herr Miller himself and his highly 'scientific' methods with the very same fetishistic reverence with which a 19th-century savage from the island of Fiji would offer his face to receive the chieftain's blessed spittle, whilst his Tibetan contemporary would swallow a pill made from the Dalai Lama's miraculous excrement. The thirst to keep up with the cutting edge (of an 18th-century standard, no less) of Western science drives some of our compatriots to extreme lengths – right down to customs and habits that have long since become a thing of the past, even in the most remote corners of Asia.

Alongside the 'academic scholar' Miller, the 'patriotic writer' V.K. Trediakovsky was also active in St Petersburg. Lacking any literary talent whatsoever, this author made a living
'historical' research, interpreting Italy as 'Udalya' and deriving Spain from the Polish 'wyspa' – 'island' (never mind that Spain

is a PENINSULA – such trifles never troubled Trediakovsky), whilst in Latin America he discovered ‘Gat Malaya’ – Guatemala. I may be mistaken, but it seems he was the one who invented the ‘Russian Etruscans’. Incidentally,
Vasily Kirillovich sought out ‘Russians’ literally everywhere – from Scotland (also known as Caledonia – well, obviously, ‘Kholodonia’, meaning a cold country!) to Turkestan.

A true, unqualified academic scholar, the Russian genius Mikhail Vasilyevich Lomonosov, as his biographers write, ‘placed Trediakovsky on a par with Miller in his ability to write scholarly nonsense, often vexing and, for Russia, reprehensible’. Their successors still stand on that pedestal to this day. And, partly thanks to them, and partly due to our own laziness and lack of curiosity—as noted by Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin himself—many of the very real and scientifically verifiable glorious deeds of our ancestors remain consigned to oblivion.

It is of one such chapter in our history—still unknown to the majority of readers—that I shall speak in this book. Of how the Russian Caucasus once began. This book will contain the heroism of victories, the bitterness of defeats, sorrow and laughter—everything that fills every page of the life of our people and our country. Both these victories and these defeats are worthy of our remembrance, dear reader. For this is our history; these are the deeds of our ancestors. This is who we are.

Part One: Caucasian Captives
The Slavs in the Caucasus: 7th–8th centuries

Chapter 1
The Rus' near Derbent

Before the 'golden age of Rus' poetry. The green flame of jihad. The grim fate of the 'infidels'. Derbent – the iron gate of the Caucasus. Shahriyar's letter. Persian historians and the 'Book of Degrees' on the Rus' beneath the walls of Derbent. Which Rus' are we talking about? Danubian Rus' under the Avar yoke.

We ride on, we ride on, we ride on… The foothills surge up, one slope after another; A jagged ridge, leaning against the sea,
Behind them, white as snow, buried in the snow.

Valery Bryusov, 'Along the Sea'

In keeping with that same unfortunate tradition of forgetfulness, which I mentioned in the introduction, the history of the Russian Caucasus begins for us in the nineteenth century. Pushkin – 'The Caucasus lies beneath me, alone on high…', Lermontov – he is almost entirely there, and *The Demon*, and *Mtsyri*, and Pechorin… he perished there. And the oxen dragging Griboyedov's body along the winding Caucasian paths, and *The Caucasian Captive* and Tolstoy's *Hadji Murat*. All this happened, all this is ours, but… but the Russian Caucasus did not begin with this. The settlement of this region by the Slavs, both as a people and by Rus' as a state, began long before the golden age of Russian literature – long before the baptism of Rus'.

The year 644 according to the Christian calendar, the twenty-second year of the Hijra. Twenty-two years earlier, Muhammad, a camel driver and the rasul—the herald—of a new, one God – 'and there is no god but He!' – fled with his followers from Mecca, the religious centre of the Arab pagan tribes, to Medina. A mere twenty-two years – and the co-religionists of that recent handful of fugitives were now sweeping like a desert whirlwind, a samum,

swept across the ‘tray of the universe’, sweeping away powers and tribes, altars and thrones that had seemed eternal. The green banners of the new faith – Islam – rise above the ruins of the ancient Persian Empire, above Palestine – the holy land of Christianity, which had already become the religion of the whole of Western Europe, Asia Minor and North Africa to boot. Warriors on swift-footed horses and stately camels are flooding into Egypt, the decrepit land of the pyramids, and their leader, gazing at the remains of the Library of Alexandria—destroyed by Christian fanatics—shrugs his shoulders: ‘If these books contain anything not found in the Qur’an, they are harmful. If not, they are useless.’ From India to Spain, a sea of white burnouses and green banners will spread, along with green Damascene blades bearing patterns resembling script, and Arabic books with script resembling patterns. In the twenty-second year of the Hijra, this deluge rolls up to Derbent. Beneath the walls of this city, which the Arabs would call Bab-ul-Abwab – ‘the gate of gates’ (strictly speaking, this is merely a translation of the city’s Persian name) – our tale of the Slavs and Rus’ in the Caucasus begins; three and a half centuries later, it will end beneath these very same walls.

The conquerors were extremely powerful. Overnight, the vast empire of the Second Rome was reduced to a pitiful scrap of land in Asia Minor and the Balkans. Persia, of which Derbent had been a part, no longer existed. Shah Yazdegerd III fled, abandoning the ancient capital, Ctesiphon—which had been captured by the conquerors—to be torn apart by the nomads of the sandy deserts, who had routed his armies in three bloody, fierce battles; he fled to an inglorious end in Central Asia, in distant Merv.

The law of the victors declared: ‘Fight those who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day, who do not forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, and who do not submit to the religion of truth – from among those to whom the Scripture was revealed – until they pay the jizya with their own hands, being humbled’ (Qur’an, Sura IX, verse 29). The ‘People of the Book’ – a category to which Muslims counted Jews, Christians and Sabians – had it somewhat easier: they had a threefold choice – to convert to Islam, to perish, or to agree to pay the jizya tax. Pagans were not even granted that choice – become a Muslim or die. Followers of Zoroastrianism, the ancient religion of Fire and Truth, Light and Purity, from which Judaism once drew many ideas and concepts (such as the One God, paradise and hell, the Last Judgement, the coming

(such as the Saviour, etc.), which enabled him to rise somewhat above the level of one of the Middle Eastern tribal religions; Muslim theologians, so to speak, grudgingly agreed to count him amongst the 'People of the Book' – although they have continued to harbour doubts about this to this very day. When the conquest, with its massacres and plundering, came to an end, treaties were concluded along the following lines: the Arab commander was 'paid five hundred thousand dirhams by the inhabitants of Ray and Kumis (a city and region in the vicinity of modern-day Tehran. – *O. V.*), on condition that he would not kill or enslave any of them, nor destroy any of their fire temples'. The Arabs placed a yoke around the necks of the conquered, one they had fashioned with their own hands – the descendants of caravan drivers and caravan raiders from scorching Arabia adopted this tax system from the civilised Persians, 'embellishing' it to their own taste with customs such as the following: 'the dhimmi (a derogatory term for Zoroastrians. – *O. V.*) must stand whilst paying the tax, whilst the official collecting it sits. The dhimmi must be made to feel that, when paying the tax, he occupies a lower position. On a specified day, he goes in person to the emir appointed to collect the poll tax. The emir sits on a high throne. The dhimmi appears before him, holding out the poll tax in the palm of his hand. The emir takes the tax so that his hand is on top and the dhimmi's hand is below. Then the emir strikes him on the neck, and the man standing next to the emir drives the dhimmi away. The public is allowed to witness this spectacle.' It is surprising that no ticket prices were set… Lower-ranking tax collectors also did not miss out on their share of the fun – a favourite Arab folk pastime became snatching the sacred sash, the 'kushti' – a symbol of loyalty to the faith of their ancestors – from the dhimmi in the middle of the street and wrapping it round his neck. Ordinary Arabs did not stay on the sidelines of the merriment either – thanks to the full might of the victors' state apparatus being on their side – and did not miss an opportunity to spit into the flame sacred to Zoroastrians – in their presence, of course. Another form of entertainment involved the prolonged, agonising beating of a dog in full view of the Zoroastrians – Zoroastrianism commanded that these faithful, intelligent and kind friends and helpers of mankind be honoured and protected. Incidentally, it was at this time that the dog became a despised animal among Muslims; contrary to the Qur'an, it came to be classed as unclean, and

being compared to a dog became the most vicious insult for a Muslim.

All in all, there was nothing simpler than ridding oneself of these abuses. All that was needed was to renounce the Forces of Light worshipped by their ancestors, who had built an empire stretching from the Tibetan mountains to the pyramids of Egypt, in those centuries when the Arabs were savages who knew nothing of clothing (incidentally, the followers of the 'Merciful, Merciful' Allah did not even during the conquest – the inhabitants of one Arab city, having taken the enemy commander prisoner, cut the poor man to pieces and each ate a morsel, hoping
to 'share in' his good fortune). One simply had to utter the formula of submission to the jealous god of the sandy deserts—who recognised no other deities—and his earthly messenger, and that was all. But once this was done, there was no turning back – otherwise, one would be deemed an apostate, and there was but one fate in store: death – merciless, inevitable, agonising. So it was either a foreign faith, with prayers in an unfamiliar language, with customs of circumcision and the prohibition of pork that were alien to the descendants of Zarathustra, with the humiliating act of falling to one's knees and touching one's forehead to the ground (Zoroastrians prayed standing up), or the payment of extortionate taxes and endless humiliations.

I repeat – such humiliations were, in fact, a manifestation of the victorious Muslims' relative tolerance and by no means applied to everyone. I would very much like those who, having read too much of Mikhailov or Nikitin, dream of an Islamic future for Russia, to read these lines more carefully. Do they really want such a fate – or one like it – for those of their loved ones who will not rush to repeat after the country's new masters, 'There is no God but God'?

Derbent was a semi-independent principality situated in a narrow pass between the shore of the Caspian Sea – then known as the Abeskun or Hirkanian Sea – and the spur of the Caucasus Range descending towards it, in what is now Dagestan. Hence the 'Gate': the one who sits in the fortress decides whether or not to let an army that has approached its walls pass through. Once upon a time, there was no fortress here – and the northern gales, raging on the other side of the Caucasus Mountains, reached as far as Ta-Kemet, the Black Land of the pharaohs and pyramids – the Cimmerians of Lagdamm,
the Scythians of Partatua[4] … and then Derbent was built here. Neither the Sarmatians nor

the Huns ever broke through to the prosperous and bountiful south past its strongholds – something to be proud of! Once the ‘Gate of Gates’ had been shut within the stone castle’s fortress walls, the northern nomads no longer troubled the realm of the fire-worshipping Persian kings. The fortress is ruled by a little king with a suspiciously familiar name, Shahriyar – could it be the very same man whose head was turned by the cunning Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*? Even if it is him, he has no time for fairy tales now. The quill glides across the paper, leaving a shiny black trail of ink.

‘I find myself caught between two enemies: one is the Khazars, and the other is the Rus’, who are enemies of the whole world, and of the Arabs in particular; yet no one but the people of this land knows how to wage war against them. Instead of paying tribute, we shall fight the Rus ourselves with our own weapons, and we shall hold them back so that they do not leave their own country.’

Thus wrote Shahriyar to the ruler of the Arabs, and the Commander of the Faithful accepted the proposal of the ruler of the small fortress. Instead of tribute, Derbent was obliged to provide military service – to ensure that the Khazars and the Rus’ did not invade from the north…

This is how the Persian Muhammad Bal-ami, a contemporary of Prince Svyatoslav, describes the events of the seventh century. Not everyone believes his account, particularly those historians—and there are many of them—who, following the teachings of Bayer, Miller and Schlözer, believe that the Rus originated in Scandinavia[5] . The fact that, in the more than two centuries that have passed since the days of the ‘founding fathers’ of Normanism, no evidence whatsoever—not even the faintest hint—has been found to suggest that a people known as the Rus’ ever lived in Scandinavia does not trouble them. They dismiss out of hand the numerous

evidence of Rus’ outside Scandinavia prior to the 9th century is dismissed out of hand (and they have still not found a single mention of ‘Scandinavian Rus’ after three centuries of searching – not a single one). But we shall not follow their example and will examine this case in a little more detail. How do the Normanists justify their rejection of Bal’ami’s account? By the fact that it recounts events taking place three centuries before his own time. But the majority of our sources would not stand up to such strict scrutiny, not even those favoured by the Normanists (for reasons entirely unknown – they recount how Swedes, posing as envoys of the Kagan of the Rus’, were suspected and, following an investigation, exposed – judge for yourselves whether one can infer from this that the Swedes and the Rus’ were one and the same people).

The Bertin Annals recount events of the 9th century, whilst the manuscript dates from the 15th. There is actually twice as much material here as there is from Bal-ami's account up to the time of Shahriyar. Furthermore, the Rus' were indeed the scourge of the entire world in the 10th century, and the Arabs suffered greatly at their hands. In 844, exactly two hundred years after Shahriyar had negotiated freedom from tribute for himself and his principality, 'the pagans known as the ar-Rus broke in there, took captives, plundered, burned and killed'.

'There' refers to Seville, one of the wealthiest cities in Arab Spain. Coins belonging to the Arab emir who ruled Spain that year were found in a hoard on the island of Rügen ('the island of the Rus' according to Arab historians and geographers, and Buyan in Russian fairy tales and incantations). We shall yet see how the Rus' harassed the Muslims of the Transcaucasus in the 10th century. As for the 7th century, however, there is almost no mention of the Rus'. Apart from Bal-ami, the only other source to mention the Rus' at this time is his younger contemporary al-Salibi, also a Persian. Incidentally, he corroborates his compatriot's account by stating that the double wall of Derbent—one end of which abuts the sea, whilst the other stretches into the mountains—was erected by Khosrow I the Just (Anushirvan), Shah of pre-Islamic Iran, who died in 579, specifically to defend against the Khazars and the Rus. This account is also corroborated by the Russian *Book of Ranks*, written in the 16th century at the behest of Ivan Vasilyevich the Terrible. It states: 'During the reign of Heraclius, the Rus' kings waged war against King Khosro of Persia.' Heraclius was the emperor of the Byzantine, or Eastern Roman, Empire, who ruled it in the first half of the seventh century, whilst 'Khosdroy of Persia', as one might easily surmise, was the Persian king Khosrow. I find it very difficult to imagine that the Moscow scribes at the court of the fearsome tsar were reading Arabic historians who lived more than half a thousand years before them. All the more so because there could hardly have been any question of an alliance between the Rus' and the Khazars in the 10th century. And the Khazars regarded the Rus' not even as enemies, but as monsters, 'chudo-yudo', with whom there was only one course of action – to sever their heads from their shoulders; and even their dwellings were not to be plundered, but hacked to pieces – including the little apple tree with its golden apples, the gilded bed with its silk furnishings, and the golden well with its silver goblet. And to the Khazars, the Rus' were the dreadful people of 'Ros' from the Old Testament prophecies about the end of the world, who had burst forth from the lands of the North, where the wise science of Kabbalah had placed the 'gates of evil', and the khagan-bek of Khazaria, Joseph, in a letter to his fellow believer and kinsman Hasdai ibn Shaffrut, vizier to the Emir of Córdoba, takes particular pride in the fact that he does not allow

the Rus' into Muslim lands (just like Shahryar once did!). So the notion of 'the Khazars and the Rus' against the Muslims' in the 10th century could only have been a memory of more ancient times.

And which Rus' are we talking about, by the way? Information about the Rus' in Europe – prior to the formation of the Rus' state in the 9th–10th centuries – is mainly confined to two regions: the southern coast of the Baltic (where they were more commonly known as the Rugians) – the island of Rügen, which appears to have been their ancestral homeland – and the Middle Danube region, where the Rus-Rugians arrived as federates, allies and defenders (that is, the Wends and Varangians) of the Roman Empire in the 3rd century. Shahriyar's domains were separated from the Danubian Rugians by half the Danube, the Black Sea (also known as the Pontus) and the Caucasus Mountains. The route was not only far from easy, but also thoroughly 'documented' by all manner of sources, none of which at that time mention the Rus' east of the Black Sea or west of Derbent. Not to mention the fact that
Danubian Rus' (which, incidentally, left a vivid mark on our epic tales[6]) was at that time completely deprived of any independence whatsoever and was under the yoke of the Avars.

One example of this is the participation of the Danube Rus' in the siege of Constantinople by the Avars and the Slavic tribes under their command in 618. The chronicles of the Tiflis Cathedral attribute this siege specifically to the Rus', who were ruled by a 'khan'. The simplest course of action, of course, would be to dismiss this account as 'late', which is precisely what Normanist historians do. However, firstly, this account is corroborated by the 12th-century Byzantine poet Constantine Manasses; and secondly, by the time the surviving copy of the Tiflis chronicles was compiled (in the 13th century), the Rus' had long since ceased to be ruled by any khagans, and these Rus' were not sailing on
'monoxyls' – single-plank boats – a Georgian chronicler, unfamiliar with the Greek word, attributed it to the Rus' – but on ships. The Byzantine fleet, having lured the Slavic ships into a trap with a false beacon, destroyed them. It was in honour of this victory, incidentally, that a thanksgiving akathist to the Mother of God, 'The Chosen Commander', was composed – either by Roman the Sweet-Singer or by Patriarch Sergius. Later, this psalm would be adopted by the Russian Church – and for over nine centuries, Russian princes, tsars and emperors would draw inspiration for battle and give thanks for victory through verses composed in honour of the rout and annihilation of their forefathers. Moreover, the 'Heavenly Queen' and future 'Intercessor'

The ‘lands of Rus’ were also blamed for the deaths *of* Slavic *women* – Byzantine marauders, who gathered weapons and armour from the bodies of Slavs washed up on the shore, often discovered beautiful female bodies beneath the soldiers’ armour. At the same time, the Syrian writer Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor mentions a people known as the Rus, who lived alongside the Amazons – recall the Slavic female warriors – to the north and west of the Avars.

A whole host of authors – the Lombard Paul the Deacon, the Spanish Jewish slave-trader Ibrahim ibn Ya’qub, the Arab al-Idrisi, the German Adam of Bremen, and, finally, the Czech Cosmas of Prague – place the warlike Amazon women in Central Europe. Cosmas, incidentally, attributes the Amazons to the past of his own people – whilst Paul the Deacon considers the ‘dog-people’ to be the ancestors of his people; Zacharias, on the other hand, places them alongside the ‘Amazons’ and the Rus’ people, which is of great assistance in locating the tribes listed on a geographical map. Moreover, in our epic tales, the ‘Polyanitsa maidens’—whom many researchers attempt to portray as steppe horsewomen, whether of Sarmatian (D.M. Balashov, B.A. Rybakov), or even Khazar (V.V. Kozhinov) origin, in reality very often hail from the lands of Lyakhovitsa or Politovsk. It is from there that Nastasya Mikulichna, Dobrynya’s wife, and the unfortunate Princess of the Dnieper, the short-lived wife of the bogatyr Dunay, whose tragic fate is immortalised in the paintings of the great Konstantin Vasilyev, and Vasilisa Mikulichna, wife of the boyar Stavra Godinovich, whom the reader will surely recognise at least from the cartoon of the same name. Admittedly, Pseudo-Zacharias’s description of the Rus’ is somewhat bewildering – in his account, they are a race of giants… who do not use weapons! In reality, however, there is nothing strange about this: at the beginning of the 7th century, Theophylact Simocatta, a chronicler of the Eastern Roman Empire, reported on envoys – gusli players – from the Slavic people who had arrived in Constantinople. These envoys – Theophylact specifically mentions the Slavs’ heroic stature and build, which had struck the emperor – hailed either from lands conquered by the Avars or from neighbouring lands on the shores of the Baltic Sea; they brought with them only gusli, and the envoys explained that their people did not handle iron or wage war. This account gave rise to a multitude of diverse interpretations amongst scholars: Slavophiles were moved by the meekness of their ancestors, whilst Slavophobes interpreted it as evidence of the savagery of a tribe that had emerged in the Middle Ages straight

from the Stone Age [7] ; a third group suspected the envoys' words of being the cunning ruse of spies seeking to lull the Byzantines into a false sense of security; whilst a fourth group, with an air of importance, discussed the 'stereotypical image of barbarians in ancient literature'. It seems to me, however, that the whole thing is down to a translation error. The envoys may well have been priests – like the Druids of the Gauls or the priests of Kievan Rus' – and they were indeed often forbidden, for ritual reasons, to touch weapons or iron in general. In the epic 'Volkh Vseslavich', for example, the title character – who is not only a bogatyr but also a sorcerer – scarcely touches weapons at all, resorting instead to sorcery both in war and on the hunt. He even kicks open the doors to the enemy's chambers with his foot, and dispatches the enemy himself with his bare hands. Similar customs were found amongst the Slavs' neighbours and kinsmen – the Germanic tribes. Among the Anglo-Saxons, a priest was forbidden even to touch a sword; amongst the Goths, priests did not fight during battles but *performed* war chants – yet even Theophylact Simocatta's priest-ambassadors carried lyres! Well, the Byzantines simply adopted the customs of the social classes and castes as the customs of the people – that is all. As for Pseudo-Zacharias the Rhetor, he simply took this information about the Slavic subjects of the Avars to describe the Rus people living in those regions, in the very place where 6th-century Gothic and Lombard authors mention 'Rugiland' – the land of the Rugians and Rus – and 9th-century German sources mention Rusaramarca, the land of the Rus. In the 7th century, the Rus' from the Danube – whether vassals or allies of the Avars – had no interest in the distant Caucasus.

Chapter 2
The Volga Trade Route

‘The Fur Route’. The route ‘from the Varangians to the Greeks’ – a famous phantom. ‘Hauling’ on army draught animals. The routes of the Crusaders and pilgrims. How far the stone boats sailed. Gods and men on the Volga-Baltic route.

Oh, thank you, Mother Volga, I have
wandered upon you for twelve years, I
have never seen any misfortune,
Nor did I see any sorrow befall me,
And I left you in good health,
and now I’m off, brave as ever, to visit Novgorod.

The epic ‘Sadko’

But the attentive reader will note that it is even further from the Baltic to the Caucasus.

Well, firstly, it’s not really that far – just take a look at the map. Secondly, it is precisely from the Baltic to the Caspian that one of the most ancient and famous (in its day) trade routes runs – the Volga–Baltic Route. It is also sometimes called the ‘Fur Route’ (by analogy with the Silk Road, which led from China to Europe) – and the route ‘from the Varangians to the Khazars’ (by analogy with the mythical route ‘from the Varangians to the Greeks’). Yes, dear reader, this is not a typo. That very route ‘from the Varangians to the Greeks’, about which so much has been said… I beg your pardon, dear reader, historians – is a myth. It is mentioned just once in the *Tale of Bygone Years* in connection with the journey of the Apostle Andrew from Sinope in Greece to the lands of the Slavs and the Varangians, and from there to Rome[8].

Let us be clear: scholars, with rare unanimity, refuse to see anything in the account of Andrew’s travels other than

a legend – yet, for some reason, they do believe in the reality of the route he is said to have travelled. Incidentally, the archaeologist Andrei Nikitin recently put forward an original and highly plausible hypothesis that, in the original version of the legend, the route taken by Christ's disciple did not run along the Dnieper – the Shelon – the Volkhov, but along the Danube; since neither the Shelon nor the portages are mentioned in the chronicle's legend of the apostle's journey – along the very same river, referred to in the chronicle as the Dnieper, Andrew travels past the 'Kyiv' mountains, past the 'Slovenians' living around
'Novgorod', to the Varangians, and from there to Rome. The 'Kyiv' mountains, in this case, must be identified as the Danube town of Kius, still indicated on road signs from the time of Andrew. Then, of course, the 'Sloveni' visited by the apostle
'Slovenians' were, of course, the Slovenians; their 'Novgorod' is Nograd, which still stands in the same region, around which towns and villages with 'bath' names have clustered – Rudabanya, Cinobanya, Lovinobanya, Banská Bystrica, Banská Štiavnica, Tatabánya – do you remember how, in the chronicle, the Apostle marvelled at the 'Slovenians' zeal for bathing? – whilst the Varangians, in that case, were the Rugians or other federates of the Great Roman Empire. But this version, for all its soundness, completely erases from history even the slightest hint of the Dnieper–Volkhov route 'from the Varangians to the Greeks'. The famous 'Austrveg' – the Eastern Route of the Scandinavian sagas – also has nothing in common with this mythological narrative, beginning in Norway and running along the southern coast of the Baltic to reach 'Gardy' – Rus'. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the famous 10th-century Byzantine emperor and writer to whom descriptions of this route are attributed, speaks, on the contrary, only of the route from Kyiv to Constantinople; moreover, he describes this route – which would have constituted one-sixth of the mythical 'from the Varangians to the Greeks' – as 'a long, dreadful and torturous journey'.

What would Born in the Purple have said if someone had told him about our scholars' fantasies regarding a trade route beginning on the shores of Scandinavia and leading to his capital?

When the baptiser of Rus', Vladimir the Saint, learnt in 1014 of the refusal of the Prince of Novgorod, his son Yaroslav (the future 'the Wise'), to submit to Kyiv and pay tribute, he issued the order:
'Clear the roads and build bridges.' Even in those days, it was impossible to travel from Kyiv to Novgorod without engineering works.

It is interesting to note that in the summer of 1987, a group of Leningrad archaeologists decided to undertake a journey along this very route 'from the Varangians to the Greeks', which, according to their reasoning—which I find unclear—was somehow supposed to corroborate the chronicler's accounts of the founding of the Rus' state and even the Norman origins of Rurik and his Varangians. I must admit I am quite unable to grasp the scholars' logic… but that is not the point. In his account of this tour for the magazine *Rodina*, its organiser, the late Gleb Sergeyevich Lebedev – who, sadly, is no longer with us – describes in detail the route along the banks of the Volkhov, Ilmen and Shelon rivers, but then somehow veers off into a lyrical digression – and 'comes to his senses' only on the Dnieper, near Smolensk. Another member of the expedition, A.M. Miklyaev, clarifies the matter: unburdened by either weapons or goods, the regatta participants transported their rowing boats (which most likely weighed somewhat less than the Norman oak longboats) across the watershed between the Ilmen Lake basin and the Dnieper basin along tarmac roads, using army lorries. A clear anachronism for the 9th century, one might say. Not to mention the fact that, as archaeologists have established, the water level in the rivers was 5 metres lower in those days, the watershed was entirely overgrown with the densest Okovsky pine forest, and instead of friendly army drivers, the travellers would have been met by local forest tribes. They might well have agreed to transport their belongings – but only as far as their own dwellings; the travellers themselves were surely regarded as an unnecessary and even harmful burden.

On the other hand, captives can sometimes be of use too: on the farm, in rituals – to offer as a sacrifice in times of great misfortune or to sell – they would come in handy somewhere.

Yes, it is worth adding: where the vivid imagination of scholars has placed the portages – across a forested watershed! – not a single name has survived from among those marking the sites of actually existing portages on the actually existing Baltic–Volga route: Volok Lamsky (now Volokolamsk), Nizhny Volochek, and so on.

Whenever the Normans, or at least the people of Novgorod, needed to visit the environs of Constantinople or the holy sites of Christianity lying beyond, they travelled by any route but the Dnieper. One need only recall the famous epic

the dashing Vasya Buslaev. When this character made the momentous decision to visit the Holy Land and the city of Jerusalem – 'having been through a lot in my youth, I must save my soul in my old age' (how exactly he 'saved his soul' there is a whole other story), he set off once again—by no means via the capital, Kyiv (though one might think he could have popped into the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra)—but instead travelled down the Volga towards the Caspian Sea. Later, near a certain Sorochinskaya Mountain, he came across some Cossacks and became friends with them (and, whilst he was at it, apparently moved with his boats from the Volga to the Don, somewhere in the vicinity of the present-day Volga–Don Canal). Continuing on his way, Vasya and his band sailed straight to the Holy Land. Scandinavian pilgrims and crusaders (such as King Harald Gilkrist) sailed to the Holy Land or travelled all around Europe. Harald even managed to pay a visit en route to the Norman ruler of Sicily, Duke Roger, who, judging by his reaction to his guests, considered himself more of a jarl named Rodgeir. He received Harald not merely as a noble kinsman – but as his own konung[9] ! A deeply moved Harald – it cost him nothing – elevated Roger-Rodgeir from the rank of jarl to that of konung, whereupon the latter immediately launched military operations to secure recognition of his royal title from his neighbours. Another konung, Erik Eyehoga, was making his way to Constantinople via Germany… in short, it seems they were making their way from the Baltic to the Black and Mediterranean Seas by absolutely ANY route except the one still featured in the pages of textbooks and popular books – and indeed serious academic works – the route 'from the Varangians to the Greeks'.

And here's the trouble – almost every literate Russian knows about this mirage, yet very few have heard of the actual trade route from the Baltic, via the Volga to the Caspian Sea or via the Don to the Black Sea.

Moreover, whilst, as we have seen, the route from Kyiv to Novgorod was no easy feat even in the 11th century, the Baltic–Volga route was in use long, long before that. Firstly, on the Caucasian coast of the Caspian Sea, particularly in Azerbaijan, graves have been found enclosed by a fence of roughly hewn stone blocks arranged in the shape of a ship. Apart from these locations, such graves are found only on the southern coast of the Baltic. Both there and on the Caspian, these burial sites date back to very ancient times – the end of the Neolithic, the Polished Stone Age, and the beginning of the Bronze Age. That is how far back the use of the Volga route by Baltic seafarers goes!

It is curious, however: which people left these stone ships behind? In fact, legends about sailing on stones or in stone ships are most commonly found amongst the Celts. Anatole France satirised such legends at the beginning of his *The Island of the Penguins*. It doesn't take much intelligence to mock them – it is far more useful to note that the Celtic saints from Brittany sail on stone boats to the Enchanted Land, that is, to another world, or, to put it slightly differently, to the world beyond. So it is quite possible that the hagiographies of the holy fathers from Brittany preserved the memory of the funeral rites of their pagan ancestors. Incidentally, in the north of Rus', the memory of saints or holy relics floating on stones has also survived. According to his hagiography, Anthony the Roman, the future saint, arrived in Novgorod on a stone (this remarkable 'sailing stone' can still be seen by the walls of the monastery he founded). There are legends of stone crosses or icons arriving on stones down rivers. All this is a development of the same Celtic theme. But is it really Celtic – or has the memory of some other people been preserved here? The fact is that French Brittany, where legends of the saints' stone boats were particularly well known, was inhabited in Caesar's time by a tribe… the Venedi. And there, too, burials in 'boats' made of stone slabs have been found. Who these Venedi were is still a matter of debate amongst scholars; personally, I am most inclined towards the view of the archaeologist V.V. Sedov, who suggested that this was originally the name given to the common ancestors of the Slavs, Balts, Germanic peoples and Celts. As the Englishman Houston Stewart Chamberlain, one of the founders of racial theory, used to say, the 'Celtic-Slavic-Teutonic' peoples (it is worth noting in passing that this father of racial science, as we can see, does not consider the Slavs to be 'subhuman'). In any case, the Germans called the Baltic Slavs 'Wends', and the Finnish peoples still refer to Russians as 'venelaya' to this day. This is hardly a coincidence. Nor is it a coincidence that the Karelian-Finnish epic, the famous *Kalevala*, features as its central figure the prophetic musician, the first farmer and seafarer, Veinemäki, whom some runic songs simply refer to as Veneläinen – literally 'Russian'! The second piece of evidence lies in the pagan mythology… of the Georgians. Kartvelian legends mention Pirkuši, the god of smiths and thunder, the lord of fire and iron, the fiery one. You don't need to be a philologist to spot the striking similarity between his name and that of the Baltic god of thunder and patron of blacksmiths, Perkūnas. Another deity,

Kopala, the bringer of fertility, bears a striking resemblance to the Slavic Kupala – ‘they regarded him as the god of the earth’s fruits’, as the manuscript ‘On the Idols of Vladimir’ reports. Incidentally, the Georgians adopted Orthodoxy in the year 330 – so you may judge for yourselves when the Baltic-Slavic gods might have found their way into their mythology. One cannot help but recall here that the Sumerian
‘urudu’ – copper – and ‘daragu’ – path – are very reminiscent of our ‘ruda’ and ‘doroga’. It is, of course, possible that this is merely a coincidence of sound. What all sorts of coincidences do not happen in life – the little imp from POLYNESIAN legends, the kukumara, bears a striking resemblance to our kikimora, even though there are no other notable similarities between Slavic and Polynesian cultures[10] . So it is risky to dismiss a coincidental phonetic similarity out of hand – you might just find yourself in the company of those searching for ‘Russian Etruscans’. But still, still…

It is also interesting to note this very early evidence of the existence of the Volga route from the Baltic to the Caspian Sea. The Gothic historian Jordanes, in his work *On the Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, lists the tribes and peoples subject to the ancient Gothic ruler, King Hermanarich of the Amali clan, as follows. These are the Tiudi (Chud-Estonians), the enigmatic Inaunks, the Vasinabronki (the Veps as a whole), the Mereni (the Meryans, who once inhabited the Rostov lands), the Mordens (I am sure, dear reader, that you have guessed this yourself, but if not – the Mordvins), and the Imniskars (some see a resemblance in the latter part of this name to the name Yoshkar-Ola, so this is the earliest known mention of the Mari people). This is followed by a list of tribes unknown to scholars – the Tadzans, the Atauls (could this perhaps refer to Atil-Itil, the Turkic name for the Volga?), the Navego, the Bubegens, and, finally, the Koldy – the Colchians, the Georgians. Of course, there is no point in taking such a ‘Germanarich’s empire’ seriously. There are neither archaeological nor written sources to suggest that Germanic invaders in the Black Sea region ever ruled from the shores of the Sea of Azov or the Meotida over the Georgians or the Mordvins, let alone the Veps and Estonians. When the Huns swept down from the East upon the Goths, the aged Hermanarich—whom Jordan portrays as a sort of Gothic Alexander the Great—faced the new invaders not with a multi-ethnic army from his mythical empire, but with the Goths alone. In fact, having listed the peoples and tribes supposedly subjugated by his ancestors, Jordan seems to forget about them, and neither the Chuds nor the Ves,

nor the Mordvins nor the Georgians appear again in the pages of his work. E.Ch. Skrzhinskaya, a scholar of Jordanes' work, Skrzhinskaya has put forward a very plausible hypothesis that Jordanes, writing in Northern Italy, had in his possession a so-called 'travel guide' or 'internarium' – travellers used such lists in those days for want of maps, especially in little-known barbarian lands – and he, without the slightest hesitation, 'bestowed' all the tribes he had listed upon his mythical 'empire'. But this passage is of interest to us because it attests that the Volga route from the Baltic to the Transcaucasus was known and used during the Great Migration.

So, if the question is posed as follows – could the Rus' have appeared at the walls of Derbent in 644? – the answer is unequivocal: they could. And it was specifically the Baltic Rus', from the southern shores of the Baltic Sea – for nowhere else along its shores has this people been recorded by anyone, and there is no evidence of the notorious Normans travelling along the Volga route, especially at such an early date. However, we shall discuss this a little later.

Chapter 3
The Slavs and the Khazars at Partava

The Khazar horde at Partava. The Slavic speech of the khagan's warriors. The strange 'objectivity' of historians. The Slavs in the 7th century – appearance, clothing, armament. The art of war of our ancestors. Warriors like beasts – from the Ants to the Zaporozhians. From a band to a regiment.

– Who's up there on the walls?
– Our sentries.
– What can they see?
– Smoke rising from the campfires.

Dm. Fangorn, 'The Prince'

And the Slavs had certainly made their way into the Transcaucasus; on this point, Shahriyar knew what he was talking about. Several decades before his letter to the Arab ruler, in 628, the Slavs had 'made their presence felt' in the Transcaucasus, specifically in alliance with the Khazars. The Armenian historian Moses Kagantakavatsi, in his book *The History of Agvan*, reports on one of the incursions by the North Caucasian Khazar tribe into the Transcaucasus. The nomadic army laid siege to the city of Partava – we shall return to this city later, though under its new name, Berdaa. It has not disappeared; even today, under the name Barda, it stands on the banks of one of the Kura's tributaries, near the motorway and railway linking Agdam with Yevlakh, in the western part of Azerbaijan. At that time, it was still Armenian territory – or, to be more precise, the region was known as Albania; however, to avoid confusion with the modern Balkan country, we shall refrain from using that name here. So, the Khazar army laid siege to Partava, demanding a ransom, as was the custom of the barbarians. The Armenian chronicler, who had gone out to the besiegers' camp along with other envoys or hostages, walked amongst the bonfires that reeked strongly of dung; he heard the conversations of the barbarian warriors and saw them eating and drinking, wiping their thick moustaches.

Moses spent his time in the enemy camp to good effect – he recorded several words from the language of the conquerors sitting by the fires. Historians were greatly surprised by the results of his curiosity – every single word recorded by Moses turned out to be… Slavic! For instance, the warriors sitting by the fires referred to noblemen as 'tiuns' – and four hundred years later, during the era of Yaroslav the Wise's 'Russkaya Pravda', this would be the term used for princely servants in Rus'. Scholars differ somewhat in their interpretation of the Khazar name for a ladle – 'chorum'. Some see this as 'skull' – meaning a pot, rather than the skull itself, naturally… although bowls made from skulls were known to the Slavs (the Bulgarian prince Krum, for example, had a bowl made for himself from the skull of the defeated Byzantine emperor Nikephoros I) and were reflected in Russian fairy tales, songs ('from a wild head, a skull cup') and epics ('If you have no a beer cauldron—then here is Tugarinov's wild head for you!'). Others suggest 'sholom' or 'shelm', presumably assuming that the warriors drank from helmets, which the Armenian mistook for cups in the dim light. But everyone agrees that this is a Slavic word. As for the animal fat with which the warriors dining by the campfires smeared their moustaches, they called it 'salo'. And whilst the Khazars may well have borrowed the first two words from the Slavs – after all, the Hungarians had adopted the title 'voivode' even before settling on the Danube – I personally find it hard to believe that these nomadic cattle-breeders would have borrowed the name for 'salo' from farmers. One can only surmise that, alongside the Khazar horsemen, a band of Slavic daredevils was present beneath the walls of Partava.

Incidentally, one of the earliest references to the Slavs is, strangely enough, also found in Armenian texts. Moses of Khoren, a contemporary of the chronicler of the Slavic warriors of Khazaria, mentioned in the 5th century a people known as the Skalavats, in whom N.M. Karamzin recognised the Slavs – the Sklavini, as they were called by Greek and Latin authors, and the Sakaliba, as they were called by the Arabs. And not merely the Slavs, but the proto-state of the 'Seven Tribes', upon which Asparukh, chieftain of the nomadic Bulgars, founded the Bulgarian state. There is an even earlier mention – the 'Suoveni', marked on Ptolemy's map in the 2nd century CE. However, many historians today choose to ignore both of these. The Slavs, they say, are mentioned by Latin and Byzantine historians from the 6th century onwards, and that is that. All the more so because it was in that very century that the so-called Prague-Korchak archaeological culture emerged, with which

it is now fashionable to link the emergence of the Slavs to, despite the fact that neither the cultures of the Polabian and Baltic Slavs, nor the cultures of their colonists in Eastern Europe—the Krivichians and the Ilmen Slavs—show any continuity with it. Or are the inhabitants of Novgorod and Smolensk not Slavs?! In general, some historians, who pride themselves greatly on their notorious 'objectivity', are strangely biased precisely when it comes to the Slavs. What sort of absurd method is this – to begin the history of a group of peoples with the first written mention of a general name for that group? By that logic, there could be no Finnish tribes prior to Tacitus's first mention of the Finns; yet these so-called tribes calmly adorn every map of prehistoric Europe, dating back almost to the Stone Age. In that case, the Goths and Teutons seen by Pifeus in the 2nd century BC, the Cimbri and those same Teutons who marched on Rome somewhat later, were not 'Germans', since the word 'Germans' was first used by Caesar a hundred years later. Nor were the Huns of that time Turks or Mongols – the word 'Turks' appears in sources in the 6th century, whilst the name 'Mongols' appears four centuries later. Yet this method is applied exclusively and solely to the Slavs. What is more, two accounts from sources – those of Ptolemy and Khorenatsi – are dismissed. Why? One gets the impression that some historians feel a kind of mystical awe towards the Kabbalistic, apocalyptic symbolism of the number six. Contrary to the sources, archaeology and common sense – the 6th century, and that's that!

Unfortunately, Kagantakavatsi did not leave us a detailed description of these warriors' appearance and armament, so we will have to turn to other sources. Let us begin with their appearance. It was no coincidence that the Armenian, whilst mentioning moustaches, did not say a word about beards. Contrary to a widespread misconception, the men of the ancient Slavs and Rus' were by no means universally bearded or had shoulder-length hair. Hair was cut short or shaved off. The same applied to beards. It was only after baptism that the practice of growing long hair and beards became widespread – the Frank Ademar of Chabannes writes as follows:

'A certain bishop came from Greece and taught them (the Rus' – *O.V.*) the Greek custom of growing beards and everything else.' It is interesting to note that, apart from Christians, their main opponents – the pagan priests, the volkhvs – also let their hair and beards grow. The gold figurines from the so-called Martynivsky hoard, buried some time about a century before

the siege of Partava in the Middle Dnieper region, depict moustachioed men with closely cropped hair, dancing the ‘prisyadka’ in embroidered shirts. And this was not borrowed from the steppe peoples: at the other end of the Slavic world, where no steppe peoples would have ventured even in their wildest dreams, on the aforementioned island of Rügen, the four-headed idol of Sventovit had, according to some translations, short-cropped hair, and according to others, completely shaven hair and beards,
‘in accordance with popular custom’. The Veleti-Lutici, on whose shores Rügen was situated, according to Thitmar of Merseburg, left a tuft of hair on the crown of their shaved heads, and the pagan Polish prince Kotyshko had exactly the same hairstyle, according to
the *Great Chronicle of Poland*. Our Prince Sviatoslav the Brave looked the same in the 10th century, as described by Leo the Deacon, and in Tmutarakan [11] (present-day Taman), the Orthodox Russian nobility had their hair cut in this manner even before the Mongol invasion, greatly surprising a visiting Hungarian monk, Julian, with their appearance.

It reached ridiculous proportions – in Constantinople, one of the so-called ‘circus parties’ [12] —which it would be more accurate to call a ‘hippodrome party’, since the ancient Roman circus of Constantinople had long since served exclusively as a hippodrome by that time—and it would be even more accurate to call it, as
is known, in practical terms, as a street gang, wore—much to the shock of respectable passers-by—an outfit consisting of a relatively short tunic and loose-fitting trousers. The oddities in their appearance did not end there – the street lads shaved off their beards and had their heads almost entirely shaved, leaving only a long ponytail growing from the crown. This appearance had no less of a stunning effect on the townspeople than the punk ‘mohawk’ did on the inhabitants of a provincial Soviet town in the final decade of the Union: the Byzantines would only cut off their hair and beards as a sign of deep mourning, imperial disgrace, or, following a court sentence, as punishment for criminals. The source of this wild appearance – by the standards of Orthodox Constantinople – is easy to guess: the group was called the ‘Blues’, and in Byzantine Greek this sounded like ‘Veneti’. As we have already mentioned, Roman historians and writers referred to the Slavs as ‘Veneti’. In exactly the same way, incidentally, the Parisian rabble of a hundred and fifty years ago imitated the long hair, neck

scarves and shirts of a distinctive cut, and called themselves ‘Apaches’.

Next, a few words must be said about the weapons of those Slavic warriors who were the first to set foot on Transcaucasian soil. A Byzantine author of that time, Mauricius the Strategist, describes the Slavs’ armament as consisting of a bow and arrows, two spears – one of which was most likely a light javelin, or, as the Slavs called this weapon, a ‘sulitsa’ – and a large shield which, in Mauricius’s words, was ‘difficult to carry’. The Slavs were virtually unfamiliar with heavy defensive armour in those days – the first example of plate armour found in Slavic lands, at the Drevlyan settlement of Khotomel, dates from almost a century after the siege of Partava. But let us not go to the other extreme either – placing too much faith in the claims of Byzantine authors that the Slavs fought without armour. After all, if Byzantine chronicles speak of ‘godless Rus’ and Russian chronicles of, say, ‘godless Polovtsians’, we do not assume that the peoples in question practised scientific atheism. When the Kyiv chronicler in *The Tale of Bygone Years* asserts that the tribes surrounding the Polans ‘knew no marriage’, we do not assume that the Eastern Slavs were advocates of monastic celibacy or free love. The same applies here – surely those who saw the plate armour of horsemen, clad in iron along with their horses – the ‘klibanophores’ of the Second Rome – would not have regarded the Slavs’ leather or quilted armour (quilted armour is mentioned among the Western Slavs around the same time; in Rus’ it was called ‘tegelai’) as proper armour at all. Yet the Slavs, even without a numerical advantage, managed to rout the armoured cavalry of the Byzantine Asbad in the Balkans a full century before the siege of Partava. There were, of course, protective headgear – when facing armed horsemen, you either learn quickly to protect your head or you lose it. There are depictions of Slavic warriors from that period wearing conical and semi-circular helmets. It is also worth recalling the meaning, suggested by historians, of the word that Moses Kagantakavatsi overheard by the smoky campfires beneath the walls of Partava as ‘shorom’ – after all, it sounds closer to ‘helmet’ than to ‘ladle’ or ‘shard’.

However, the fact that some warriors of the Slavic druzhinas rushed into battle not only without chainmail, but even without tunics or cloaks – this is certainly mentioned by Byzantine authors, for example, Procopius

of Caesarea: ‘Some wear neither shirts nor cloaks (the rest of the Slavs, evidently, wore all these things. – *O. V.*), but only trousers, held up at the hips by a wide belt, and in this state they go into battle against their enemies’. However, this was not due to the poverty of these warriors, nor to the Slavs’ inability to make armour, but for an entirely different reason – the Slavs, just like other European ‘barbarians’ – the Normans, Germans and Celts – apparently had warriors who went into battle without clothing. The Scandinavian *Saga of the Ynglingar* states that such frenzied fighters ‘threw themselves into battle without chainmail, raged like mad dogs or wolves, gnawed at their shields and were as strong as bears or bulls. They killed men, and neither fire nor iron could harm them. Such warriors were called berserkers’. Some translate this word from Old Norse as ‘bear shirt’ – from ‘ber’, meaning bear (hence our word ‘berloga’ for ‘den’) and ‘serk’, meaning shirt (our word ‘sorochka’ has the same origin). Others believe that the word means ‘*without a shirt*’. Roman authors speak of the custom among elite Celtic warriors of attacking the enemy whilst wearing a single type of battle paint. Traces of this kind of belief in possession by a ‘beastly spirit’ and in a warrior’s invulnerability have been abundantly preserved in Slavic epics, legends, folk beliefs and incantations. In particular, researchers suggest that this is the origin of legends about werewolves who are invulnerable to ordinary, uncharmed weapons. The Ukrainian Zaporozhian Cossacks called such warriors ‘kharakters’. Among the ‘kharakters’ was the famous kosh ataman Ivan Sirko (meaning ‘Grey’, a Ukrainian nickname for a wolf), and Colonel Semen Paliy (‘who in the water is one with the water, who in the grass is one with the grass, who in the forest is one with the forest—is a shapeshifter in the forest a devil? That’s Paliy!’ – exclaims a Ukrainian song), and Centurion Zachariah Chepiga – are entirely historical figures. Incidentally, the belief in people capable of ‘charming’ themselves or others to ward off enemy weapons persisted in Rus for a very long time – even Paul I, in his charter, threatened such practitioners with punishment.

One cannot help but entertain a ‘heretical’ thought: surely there is something to all this; there simply must be. Otherwise, the madmen who believed in spells granting invulnerability would have perished along with their faith in the very first battle – war has no place for empty illusions. Yet here they have endured from the earliest records of the Slavs right up to modern times,

having survived Kievan Rus', the Lord of Veliky Novgorod, the Grand Duchy of Moscow, and subsequently the Tsardom of Moscow itself.

The Slavs most likely had swords too, albeit not many. After all, around that time, Lavrita, the chieftain of the Danube Slavs, said to the Avar envoys who were demanding tribute from his people: 'Has the man who will conquer our land even been born, and is he warmed by the Sun? We are accustomed not to surrender our own land, but to rule over that of others, and of this we are certain as long as there is war and SWORDS in the world.' A little later, the Polans paid tribute to the Khazars who had reached them 'one sword per chimney' – a perfectly common practice in the early Middle Ages; one need only recall King Canute, who collected tribute from Denmark in the form of battle-axes, or the Varangians, who paid tribute to Theodoric, King of the Ostrogoths, in the form of swords. Although, of course, we must not overlook another possible interpretation of the chronicle's legend. According to this, the 'sword from the smoke' should be understood in the same sense as we use the term today – a detachment of one hundred pikes or, say, twenty sabres. In that case, one can imagine that the Polans were obliged to provide one swordsman per 'smoke' – that is, per clan community. This would make it much clearer where the Slavic language in Kagan-Bek's army at Partava came from. But whether the Polyan tribute to the Khazars was symbolic or not – judging by this legend, they were familiar with swords. The question remains, however, whether these swords were spoils of war or the work of their own Slavic craftsmen – there is as yet no answer to this. And it is highly unlikely that everyone was armed with them. A far greater number of warriors in close combat had to rely on long combat knives, axes and clubs. And this was not all that unusual – for example, as late as the 13th century, six centuries later, the Tatar-Mongols were, contrary to films and illustrations in which a horde of bellowing nomads are depicted, without exception, brandishing crooked blades above their shaggy caps, for the most part armed… clubs, or at best, light chisell-like axes. Only the nobility and the wealthy could afford sabres, which, as we know, did not in the slightest prevent the Mongols from defeating enemy armies.

Here's another question: how did the Slavs fight? Judging by all accounts, the Slavs employed several methods of warfare. According to Byzantine reports, they displayed particular skill in what we would call guerrilla warfare – attacks from skilfully prepared ambushes, swift manoeuvres and acts of sabotage. A century before the Battle of Partava, during

the war against the Goths in Italy, the commander of the Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian I, the renowned Belisarius, when he needed a prisoner capable of revealing the enemy's plans, was forced to summon one of the Slavs serving in his army. And the man managed, having evaded the sentries, to penetrate deep into the enemy camp, abduct one of the noble Goths – a man who was certainly neither frail nor timid – and deliver the prisoner to Belisarius. This was, so to speak, the first 'plastun' described by historians – as the Russian Cossacks later came to call their skilled scouts, who were quite capable of snatching a Tatar murza or a Polish colonel from an enemy camp in just such a manner.

Soon the Slavs began to engage in open battles, including against numerically superior, well-armed enemies, as we saw in the case of Asbad. Moreover, by the 7th century they had learnt to storm cities (this posed a serious threat to Thessalonica, the future home of Cyril and Methodius, the enlighteners of the Slavs) – so Partava faced a very real danger. A century before its siege, John of Ephesus had observed that the Slavs 'had learnt to fight better than the Romans'. The people whom later authors referred to as Byzantines called themselves 'Romans' or 'Romai'. In fact, Byzantium was the name given to the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, otherwise known as Constantinople, and to the Slavs as Tsargrad – the Tsar of Cities, the City of Kings…

The armament described by Mauricius, in particular
the 'difficult-to-carry' shield, suggests either cavalry or a sturdy formation. The Slavs, of course, knew how to fight on horseback – they were not Scandinavians, after all, for whom a compatriot fighting on horseback (having learnt this in chivalrous Europe) still seemed, even in the 14th century, like some sort of terrifying marvel. However, the Slavs had few horsemen, just as they had few swordsmen, and they did not constitute the majority of the army either then or three centuries later, during the campaigns of the Kyiv princes Igor the Old and Sviatoslav the Brave. This is precisely why the Slavs often fought alongside nomadic horse-riding tribes; and whilst the Slavs at the Battle of Partava appear to have been fully equal allies, their kinsmen, the Slavic 'Befulchi', in the Avar Khaganate of that time were, as the saying goes, 'cannon fodder', driven ahead

towards the fortifications of the Romans or Franks by the haughty Avar conquerors. Khagan Bayan cynically boasted: ‘I shall send such people against the Roman Empire; their loss will not be felt by me, even if they were to perish entirely.’ However, the Avar Khaganate eventually fell, and relations between the Slavs and the nomads took on a completely opposite character as early as the 10th century: Grand Prince Igor the Old of Kyiv, during his campaign against the Greeks, ‘ordered’ the steppe peoples to ravage the Bulgarian lands (the Bulgarians had betrayed Igor by informing the Greeks of the Russian army’s movements during a previous campaign), whilst the Arab Ibn Hawqal, who is yet to feature in our pages, describes the Pechenegs as ‘a blade in the hands of the Rus’, which they (the Rus – *O. V.*) ‘turn against their enemies’.

Therefore, it seems to me more accurate to recall other examples of ‘cumbersome shields’ used in conjunction with spears: those of the Hellenic hoplites, the Roman legionaries and the Zulus of King Chaka. Such a shield clearly indicates the ability to fight in a dense infantry formation – a phalanx or a cohort – for outside of formation it becomes a burden to its bearer, often a deadly one; yet in a tightly closed line it is effectively a mobile fortress, capable of mounting a worthy defence even against a mounted enemy. Incidentally, there have recently been frequent claims that the Russian ‘wall of shields’ was an invention of the Vikings and came to us via the Varangians. This is a complete mix-up. The Vikings were not a nation, but a way of life; the term ‘Vikings’ was applied to native Scandinavians, to the Slavic Wends of the southern Baltic region, and to the Balts and Estonians. Yet, thanks to Hollywood, the word has for some reason come to denote an early medieval Scandinavian, giving rise to nonsensical discussions about ‘Viking dwellings’, ‘the Viking religion’ and ‘Viking women’ [13]. Secondly, the Varangians were by no means a way of life, nor were they some sort of motley band of warriors. All sources mentioning the Varangians—be it the Norse sagas, our chronicles, the edicts of the emperors of the Second Rome, or the writings of Muslim geographers—list them amongst the PEOPLES, speak of the ‘Varangian language’ and the ‘Varangian land’ – whereas, until the 20th century, there are no phrases anywhere such as ‘the language of the Vikings’ or ‘the land of the Vikings’. The chronicles state: ‘many warriors, the Varangians, and the Rus’, ‘and the Slovenes, and the Chuds, and the Meri’; Byzantine letters mention: ‘the Varangians, the Rus’, ‘the Saracens, the Franks’; the Scandinavian sagas refer to ‘the Normans and the Weringians’… Yes, dear reader, the ‘Normans and Varangians’ are DIFFERENT peoples.

The Varangians' presence on the southern coast of the Baltic is made crystal clear by a whole range of sources; there is simply no room to discuss this now. And finally, the Norman Vikings formed a 'wall' of shields only when on the defensive. They attacked in a wedge formation – if indeed they even bothered to maintain any sort of formation in battle. Mauricius himself speaks very sceptically of the ability of the fair-haired northern peoples to behave in any sort of coordinated manner in battle. This was perfectly demonstrated four centuries after Mauricius, at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in England, where Harald Hardrada, the poet-king, son-in-law of Yaroslav the Wise, met a foolish death (may the admirers of the Scandinavians forgive me, but I cannot describe the behaviour of a seasoned warrior—who managed to FORGET his chainmail in the longship whilst landing on hostile shores and was incapable of restoring order within his own ranks—in any other way). During the Englishmen's first assault, Harald's men closed ranks to form this very 'wall of shields', but as soon as the English troops, having crashed into the notorious wall, began to retreat – the Normans broke formation and rushed in pursuit.

It was then that the English knightly cavalry appeared on the battlefield… Hmm, we've strayed rather far indeed from both the Caucasus and the Slavs and the Rus'.

Let's return, at least, to the Slavs.

It was precisely for them that fighting within a 'wall' was the norm. This is how they fought in the 10th century and later. And fist-to-fist 'wall-to-wall' combat, which preserved the tactics and fighting skills still familiar to the warriors of Prince Sviatoslav the Brave, survived into the last century. Minimal dodging, minimal blocking; the legs are used only for sweeping and trampling – all of this is a latent memory of warriors behind enormous shields, in a tight formation where one cannot turn or jump, and the strike itself a single strike – a thrust with a spear or a combat knife (in unarmed combat – a straight punch) from above or to the side of the shield.

Finally, incidentally, it is worth dispelling one of the misconceptions associated with medieval warfare, which is perpetuated by 'historical' books and films. In these, a clash between two medieval armies is depicted as the convergence of two running, shouting crowds brandishing weapons, which collide, intermingle, and the battle immediately breaks up into a multitude of duels. Nothing could be further from

the reality of medieval and ancient warfare; this image arose from the mechanical transposition into the distant past… of the 20th-century bayonet charge. It is hardly surprising that in an age when casualties from firearms and other ranged weapons approach one hundred per cent, soldiers make every effort to cross the open space between the battle lines as quickly as possible. Yet even in the days of the Napoleonic Wars, the ‘foolish bullet’, together with cannonballs, claimed only thirty soldiers’ lives out of every hundred – the rest were accounted for by the ‘brave bayonet’ and its larger ‘relatives’ – the broadsword, the cutlass, the sabre and the pike. And back then, they charged in tightly closed ranks, maintaining formation, to the measured roll of drums and the sound of flutes. Yet by this time, armour and shields had already fallen out of use; whilst, on the one hand, they had reliably protected the warrior from arrows or sling stones, on the other, they had weighed him down considerably. Indeed, reader, if you do not yet believe me, I strongly recommend that you equip yourself with the equivalent in weight of the lightest armour – quilted clothing (two ordinary quilted jackets will do just fine), put a steel helmet on your head, tuck a long knife an axe, and take two rather long sticks in your hands (these will serve as our spears) and something to act as a shield – perhaps a large plank (remember – ‘hard to bear’?). Well then, reader, are you ready for a sprint? And bear in mind, whilst you ponder your answer, that at the finish line you will be required to break through not a flimsy ribbon, but a sturdy, armed man driven by the same ambitions – and possibly not just one. Think carefully about this – and then, I think, you’ll believe that medieval armies advanced unhurriedly and guarded their formation more closely than the pupil of their eye (with the exception of hotheads like the Scandinavians described above – after all, they weren’t really an army, but Vikings, gentlemen of fortune, so to speak). Incidentally, military manuals from a somewhat later period advised a mounted armour-clad warrior to approach an enemy warrior at such a speed
‘as if he were carrying his bride in the saddle before him’. A romantic turn of phrase – but the essence is quite pragmatic: if the horse runs out of breath, it will be unable to use its weight to sweep aside the enemy infantry or carry its armed and armoured rider into the fray. It is no wonder that on Lake Peipus, the infantry of the Teutonic Order (consisting, incidentally, not of the mysterious
‘knights’ in bowl-shaped helmets, as depicted in

Eisenstein's film, but of the Chudi Estonians) marched at the heart of the wedge, not lagging far behind their mounted lords and knights.

However, having dealt with questions of the Slavs' appearance, armament and combat tactics, we have left aside issues far more pertinent to our narrative. Namely – where did the Slavs in the Khazar army come from, and what was the Khaganate of that era like?

Chapter 4
The Arab–Khazar War: Slavs on Both Sides of the Front

The Pagan Khaganate. The Ants in the Azov region and their neighbours. The banner of jihad at the Iron Gates. The Battle of Ardabil and the Slavs under the green banner. Nebula's bitter choice. Pagan warriors in the service of orthodox rulers. The 'swift raid' of Mervan the Merciless. The Slavic Roncesvalles.
'The Sun-Worshipper' takes his revenge. The grim lessons of history.

His fate leads him down a double path
— even his name is two-headed:
Let SCLAVUS be a slave, but
Slavia is GLORY:
A victorious halo above the slave's head!

M. Voloshin, 'Angel of Time'

The Khazars ('Acaciri' according to the Gothic historian Jordanes, 'Kozari' in the Russian chronicles) were at that time one of the strongest nomadic tribes of the Ciscaucasia region. Who they were is not known for certain – some sources link them to the Bulgars and Pechenegs; in that case, the Khazars were Turks, or more precisely, Turkicised, Turkic-speaking Scythian-Sarmatians. This version is now accepted by the majority – although runic inscriptions found within the khaganate, previously thought to be Turkic, have in fact turned out to be Sarmatian. To be fair, it should be mentioned that some sources link the Khazars to the Georgians and Armenians, whilst the prominent pre-revolutionary historian Dmitry Ilovaisky regarded them as a Circassian—that is, Vainakh—tribe, related to the Chechens and Ingush. However,

since the majority of the names (Bulan, Ras-Tarkhan, Chichak), ranks, titles (kagan, bek, tudun) and place-names (Sarkel, Itil, Semender) in Khazaria are Turkic, it would be simpler for us, in this instance, to follow the majority and regard the Khazars as Turks. In appearance, the Khazars were originally distinctly Mongoloid – in a mocking gesture, the Armenian ruler of besieged Tiflis displayed on the city wall a scarecrow depicting their khagan, with a pumpkin
'head', two holes in place of a nose, and sparse twigs intended to represent the sparse facial hair on the chin and upper lip of the Khazar ruler, but without eyes – the wide-eyed Armenian refused to regard the narrow slits through which the nomads viewed the world as eyes. After the Khazars captured the city, the governor of Tiflis, who had the misfortune of being taken alive, paid dearly for his wit – his nose was cut off and his eyes gouged out, in a manner reminiscent of the caricature of the khagan he had drawn. Incidentally, our acquaintance, Moses Kagantakavatsi, described the Khazars who invaded the Transcaucasus in a similar manner, adding that they wore their hair loose, like women. Subsequently, Arab authors depicted the so-called 'white Khazars' at the head of the khaganate, whose appearance more closely corresponded to Caucasian and Middle Eastern standards of beauty; however, this was not the tribe's original appearance, but rather evidence of the foreign origins of the khaganate's new rulers.

The capital of the Khaganate at that time was the city of Semender on the Dagestan coast of the Caspian Sea, a base for daring raids on the main spoils of the Khazar horsemen – the rich lands of the Crimea and the Transcaucasus. The khaganate was ruled by the sacred priest-king, the khagan, from the Ashina clan – that is, the 'wolf clan' – as the golden head of a wolf was depicted on the Khazar banners. However, the throne was not hereditary; the khagan was chosen from among the numerous members of the Ashina clan. In battle, however, the Khazar cavalry was led by a military commander – the khagan-bek. Some members of the Khazar nobility converted to Christianity; others, during the reign of Khosrow Anushirvan himself and not without his assistance, adopted Zoroastrianism; whilst others adopted the religion of the hostile Arabs – Islam; but on the whole, the Khazars – both the nobility and the common people – practised the religion of their ancestors, being pagan shamans. They worshipped the Blue Sky – Tengri – as well as the Sun, all manner of spirits, and their ancestors, for whom they erected statues on burial mounds. One of the central figures of the Khazar religion was the sacred king, the

kagan. It was believed that both the Khazars' success in war and the fertility of their lands and herds depended directly on him.

The borders of Khazaria extended to the Don basin in the west and the Volga delta in the east. Alongside the Khazars themselves, their realm was inhabited by related tribes: the Black Bulgars of Khan Batbay, the Savirs and the Barsilovs; the Ugric peoples – the Hungarians and the Burtas; and the Alans – the ancestors of the Ossetians and the descendants of the former masters of the steppes, the Scytho-Sarmatians. And on the western borders of the fledgling Khazar state lived Slavic tribes proper, who had settled in great numbers and without fear on the fertile black earths of the Don and Kuban; they were, in all likelihood, descendants of the Ants. Thus, from the fourth to the seventh century, the part of the Slavic tribes that extended furthest to the south-east was referred to in this way. The Gothic historian Jordan writes of them as follows: 'A populous tribe of the Veneti is settled across vast expanses. Although their names now vary according to different
clans and localities[14] , they are nevertheless predominantly called Sklavini and Antes… The Antes, the stronger of the two tribes, extend from Danastr to Danapr, where the Pontic Sea forms a bend." Jordanes, writing in Gothic Italy, drew upon the information concerning the settlement of the Antes preserved in Gothic traditions about the wars waged against them – we shall yet come, reader, to one such tradition. But during the two centuries that elapsed between the skirmishes between the Goths and the Antes on the shores of the Pontic (Black) Sea and its tributaries, and the writing of Jordanes' *De Factis et Origine Gothorum*, the Antes did not remain in one place. In any case, the 6th-century Byzantine author Procopius of Caesarea mentions this Slavic people to the north of the Meotida, as many writers of the 'Second Rome' referred to the Sea of Azov in accordance with ancient tradition. And in the epic traditions of the Kabardians and Adyghe, heroes from the Ants tribe are mentioned, along with their battles against
the Goths, the Huns and the Romans. Moreover, the name Ant [15]appears on the funerary slabs of Bosporus Cimmerius (a Hellenic city on the Kerch Strait) as early as the 3rd century. The Bulgars roamed these very same lands before, following their defeat in the war against the Khazars, they crossed the Danube into the Balkans. It is interesting to note that in the 'List of Bulgarian Khans', in the account of the period prior to the migration, the clearly Slavic names Gostun and Bezmer appear, clearly indicating who the Bulgars' neighbours were in the Don steppes.

At the beginning of the 8th century, the Khazars, who were accustomed to attacking their neighbours themselves, were suddenly in for an unpleasant surprise – this time, they were the ones under attack. The threat came from those regions which the Khazars and their allies regarded as a sure source of military spoils – from Transcaucasia. This time, the Iron Gates of Derbent swung wide open to the north – the Arab caliphs, having put an end to their internal strife, decided to consolidate their power in the Caucasus and put a stop to the raids by the pagan northerners. To make matters worse, the nomadic barbarians were, to put it in modern terms, 'set up' by Orthodox Byzantium, which had formed an alliance with them against the Muslims threatening Eastern Rome – and limited its favours to its ally by arranging the marriage of the young Emperor Constantine V, with the unflattering nickname Kopronymos (in Russian… hm, how might one put it more gently – 'Manure-named', perhaps) to the young Emperor Constantine V, who bore the unflattering nickname 'Copronymus' (in Russian… The Arab rulers, however, took this alliance very seriously – and hordes under the green banners of jihad rushed northwards.

Behind the conquerors stood a state that was, by medieval standards, immensely powerful, backed by the vast, almost inexhaustible human and material resources of Iran, the Transcaucasus and Central Asia. Behind the Khazars lay a fragile alliance, held together solely by the military fortunes of the dominant tribe, the Khazars, and the authority of their sacred priest-khan, which, as we recall, directly dependent on luck – a union of peoples speaking a wide variety of languages – Slavic, Turkic, Ugric, Caucasian – and worshipping their gods through diverse rituals. And yet the Khazars held off the invaders' onslaught for a long time, and quite successfully at first. On occasion, Arab commanders were forced to retreat in such haste – to put it mildly – that the victors not only seized the Arabs' military treasury but even their leader's harem! We are, however, interested in those battles of this war in which the Slavs were involved in one way or another. In the Ardabil Valley, in what is now Azerbaijan, the armies of Barjil, son of the late khagan—who had died suddenly shortly before these events, leaving the country to be ruled by his widow and Barjil's mother, Parsbit – clashed with the army of the Arab commander Jarrah. This Jarrah, according to the accounts of his countrymen and contemporaries, a man of exceptional generosity, was, it seems, also a man of reckless courage, as he attacked the superior

enemy forces (on the other hand, it is quite possible that the Khazars' forces came to be described as so vastly superior only in the writings—that is, the kalam—of the Muslim chroniclers who recounted Jarrah's defeat). The battle raged for three days; on the final day, the Arabs took to their heels at the very first onslaught of the enemy, but one of Jarrah's close associates halted them with an angry cry: 'To Paradise, Muslims, not to Hell! Follow the path of God, not that of Shaitan!' – thereby recalling one of the main tenets of Islam: a warrior who falls in battle against the infidels attains salvation. Accordingly, it seems a coward can hardly hope for paradise. Alas, even this appeal could only spur the Arab army on to fight, rather than save it from defeat. By evening it was all over; Jarrah himself had perished, and of the twenty-five-thousand-strong army, barely more than a hundred had survived. The Khazars took no prisoners – the 'noble and generous' Jarrah, during his earlier, most successful campaigns, had plundered the burial mounds of the Khazar warriors, one of the nomads' most sacred sites – as Idantfir, the ruler of the Scythians, had once mockingly written to Darius the Persian, who had invaded his country, reproaching him for cowardice and challenging him to battle: 'We have neither cities nor arable land to defend; if you wish to fight us, try to lay a hand on the burial mounds of our ancestors, and you shall learn the fury of the Scythian tribe.' Of those who survived and were well aware of the attitude of Eastern despots towards bad news and those who brought it, only one made it to Baghdad to see Caliph Hisham and told the Commander of the Faithful of the destruction of his army and its commander. According to Arab accounts, this brave man was a 'Sakaliba', that is to say… a Slav!

It turns out that the Slavs fought on both sides of the front in the Arab–Khazar conflict. How could this have happened? Let me say straight away: the Don Ants, descendants of the warriors who, alongside the Khazars, had laid siege to Partava, did not betray their allies. The Slavs, the 'golden-haired Sakaliba', as enthusiastic Arab writers poetically called them, had come to the Arab army from entirely different lands. In 688, the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, Justinian II (not to be confused with Justinian the Great, known to some readers as the compiler of the famous Justinian Code, which formed the basis of modern law, and to others as the hero of Valentin Ivanov's novel *Primordial Rus* and the film adaptation of it, in which the emperor was played by Innokenty Smoktunovsky), violated the peace

under the terms of the treaty, invaded Bulgarian territory. Having taken a vast number of Slavic prisoners, Justinian settled them in the Opsikion theme—a region bordering Arab territory. Five years later, the emperor selected thirty thousand men from among the prisoners, armed them, and placed the noble Slav Nebula (Nebivalo?) – or should this name be read as 'Nevol' (the sounds 'b' and 'v' are represented by a single letter in the Greek alphabet) and seen as a bitter nickname for a captive? Having bolstered this army with a militia drawn from peasant communities, Justinian broke the peace treaty with the Arabs and attacked them. In vain did the Arab envoys remind the Orthodox ruler of the treaty and offer peace. The first battle near the Asia Minor city of Sevastopol (modern-day Sulu-Saray in Turkey) demonstrated the might of the Slavic army – the Arabs were routed. Justinian celebrated his victory.

However, the ruler, who had been so careless with his own word, should not have placed too much trust in the loyalty of others, and especially not in the faithful service of those whom he had deprived of their homeland. Soon, Nebul, at the head of twenty thousand Slavs, defected to the side of the Arab commander Muhammad, the emir of Mesopotamia. Byzantine authors, of course, had no doubt that the barbarian had been bribed – for everyone knows the greed of savage pagans, and what else could have turned this savage Nebul away from his selfless devotion to the good Christians who had invaded his land, slaughtered his kinsmen, burnt down his home, destroyed his altars, and separated him from the graves of his ancestors?

It was, of course, a bribe. Some chroniclers of Eastern Rome even reported, with the certainty of eyewitnesses, that the men of Emir Muhammad had handed over to the ungrateful barbarian prince a whole quiver full of gold coins.

They say that everyone judges by their own standards, or, to put it in more modern terms, according to the extent of their own depravity.

We may condemn Nebula – after all, the Arabs, strictly speaking, were little better – if indeed any better – than the Orthodox conquerors. They were just as intolerant of other faiths; their warriors burned foreign lands and enslaved peoples in exactly the same way. But we must not forget that, for Nebula and his people, the Byzantines were not an abstract evil, but a very real one. It was the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, and no one else, who laid waste to the Slavs' homeland and deprived them of their freedom. The Arabs, on the other hand, were, as

the saying goes, ‘the enemy of my enemy’. Nebul was neither the first nor the last to make such a mistake, and from a historical perspective, as we shall see, it was indeed a mistake.

In the next battle, it was Justinian himself who was utterly routed – clearly, Slavic arms carried considerable weight on the battlefield! The emperor, having fled in disgrace, took out his fury on Slavic families living within the borders of the Orthodox Empire. On his orders, a great many Slavic families were massacred, along with their women and children, on the shores of the Gulf of Nicomedia in the Sea of Marmara. The Muslims, however, having recognised the combat effectiveness of the Slavic warriors, settled them in three cities – Marash (modern-day Karamanmaraş in Turkey), Duluka and Rabana – providing for their upkeep through taxes, obliging them to perform military service, and supplying them with women to start families. The extent to which the Arabs valued the Slavic warriors who had defected to them is illustrated by the following fact. Caliph Umar II, who reigned from 717 to 720, referring to the population of the three cities where the Slavic warriors lived, spoke of them as those ‘whose souls must be brought to harmony’, and went on to say: ‘The Slavs *and* (!) those who have embraced Islam’. For *thirty years*, pagan warriors lived in the heart of a medieval Muslim country – and no one forced them, at knifepoint, to renounce their idols and embrace the true faith! Just imagine: whitewashed walls and ramparts, the piercing cry of the muezzins echoing from the minarets – and right there, in the courtyard of the Slavic warriors, wooden idols are inhaling the smoke of the bonfire. ‘Those whose souls must be brought to agreement’ – an Islamic phrase denoting friendly people of other faiths, whom one should persuade to embrace the truth through reasoning and generous gifts. It was in connection with such gifts that Umar broached the subject of the Slavs.

It was evidently from among such pagan warriors in the service of the rulers of the faithful that the Slavic warrior came who brought Caliph Hisham the news of the death of the commander Jarrah and his army.

Following their defeat at Ardabil, the Arabs did not abandon their claims to the North Caucasus and the Ciscaucasia. In 737, an army led by the Caliph’s brother, Mervan ibn Muhammad, marched beyond the Iron Gates. Mervan began his campaign by setting up a fortified camp ‘twenty farsangs[16]’ from Tiflis (Tbilisi)… and offering peace to the khagan. When the khagan, having accepted the offer (accompanied, as

custom, both of that time and later periods, with gifts), sent a delegation in return; Mervan, without the slightest hesitation, flouted the envoy's immunity, making him the first prisoner of his campaign. He released the Khazar envoy only after he had crossed the mountain passes (one part of the army marched north through the 'Gates of the Gates', the other through the Darial Gorge) and found himself on the territory of the Khaganate. Arab sources – though I cannot say how reliable they are – estimate the size of his army at one hundred and fifty thousand men. The Caliphate's forces captured Semender; the khagan, with forty thousand warriors, was forced to flee to the mouth of the Volga, to a small town named after the Khazar name for the great river Itil – a town that was to become the capital of the khagan's descendants. Mervan, whom the Georgians nicknamed 'the Merciless', caught up with the retreating forces, routed the Khazar army and laid waste to Itil; after this, his soldiers set out for the lands of 'the Sakalib and other infidels'. As the Arab historian al-Kufi tells us, Mervan's troops reached a certain Slavic river, which most scholars identify as the Don. Al-Masudi, following an ancient tradition often employed by Arab authors when they lacked sufficient knowledge of the regions they were describing, refers to this river as the Tanais. Along the banks of the Tanais, says al-Masudi, 'there dwells a numerous Slavic people and other peoples rooted in the northern lands'. Judging by the Arab commander's subsequent actions, the Slavic River did not welcome the newcomers very warmly, and Mervan resorted to a 'scorched earth' tactic: twenty thousand houses were destroyed, and twenty thousand families were taken captive…

To be honest, dear reader, I do not know how to interpret these figures reported by the sources. On the one hand, they seem rather hard to believe – after all, we are not talking about today's 'mum, dad and me' households, but about *normal*, traditional families with double-digit numbers of children and household members. The great-grandfather of the author of these lines had fifteen children – and this was already Orthodox Russia, which knew nothing of pagan polygamy. Let us suppose that Mervan ibn Muhammad's losses in the initial battles were insignificant; let us suppose that he could have limited himself to assigning just one warrior to guard each family – even so, guarding such a large number of captives, especially in the captives' own land, would have tied up far too many warriors. And what would they be fed on? For two centuries

earlier, the commander of the Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian the Great, the Armenian eunuch Narzes, whilst campaigning in Italy, had taken six thousand prisoners – Goths and Italians – the latter, as Byzantium claimed, having been liberated by its soldiers from the yoke of the Goths, barbarians and Arian heretics. Such a vast number of captives placed such a strain on the Byzantine army that Narzes, without batting an eyelid, ordered the prisoners – six thousand people, Europeans and Christians – to be simply slaughtered. And it is somewhat surprising that an Arab Muslim proved to be more lenient towards the pagan captives.

On the other hand – at least, based on al-Kufi's accounts, it can be said that the banks of the Slavic River were very densely populated.

It is curious that it was precisely after this, rather than attacking the caliph's brother's army, which was burdened by an unimaginable number of prisoners, that the khagan admitted defeat, concluded a peace on terms dictated by Marwan, and even converted to Islam – temporarily, of course. One gets the impression that here too, as in Justinian II's war against the army of Emir Muhammad, the Slavs were a sort of decisive reserve, the main trump card; and if Mervan had ravaged the banks of the Slavic River and taken its inhabitants captive, then the Khaganate had nothing left to hope for.

Mervan ibn Muhammad settled the Slavic captives in the lands of Kakheti. Evidently, he remembered well what excellent warriors the Slavic settlers on the Byzantine frontier had been, but he failed to take into account one simple fact – both the descendants of Nebula's warriors and those Slavic warriors who came to serve the Arab caliphs before and after him did so voluntarily, of their own free will. Justinian, on the other hand, who attempted to turn serfs and captives into warriors, suffered a crushing defeat. The plans of Mervan the Merciless also met with failure – a few years later, the Slavs he had resettled rebelled, killed the governor-emir appointed to rule over them, and set off back to their homeland. The captives were not destined to see the banks of the Don again – the Arab army caught up with them and almost wiped them all out. The Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, Maurice the Strategos, whom we have already mentioned in these pages, writes of the Slavs and the Ants: 'This people cannot in any way be made slaves or forced into submission…' It is a pity that the Arab chroniclers did not

mention the place where their cavalry overtook the fleeing captives. We shall never know in which land the freedom-loving descendants of the Don Ants met their end. In all fairness, this whole story ought to be as memorable to every Russian as the heroic death of Charlemagne's knight, Count Roland—sung of by the minstrel Turold—is to every Frenchman: he fell alongside his detachment in the Pyrenean gorge of Roncesvalles, yet did not allow the Muslim hordes[17] into their native kingdom. Well, what can one do? Life is not often fair. All that remains for us, their descendants, is

only to imagine how these people walked on and on – men, women,

carrying infants in their arms, with older children clinging to their hems, their lips cracked by the heat, day after day gazing towards the northern horizon – where is it, Father Don? How the cruel Caucasian sun scorched their tears – the bitter tears of men, the quiet tears of women, the pure tears of children. And how, one cloudless morning, that sun shone behind them upon the links of their chain mail and the silver inlays of their helmets, wrapped in turbans. How husbands and fathers formed a wall around their wives, mothers, daughters and sons, preparing for the final and hopeless battle against the oppressors…

It seems this story taught the Arab ruler a lesson – or perhaps the Caliphate's strength was simply waning – but the Arabs never again undertook such campaigns north of the Caucasus Mountains. As for Mervan, following what Arab writers described as his 'swift raid', upon learning of the murder of his brother, Caliph Walid, he hurried back to his home realm and proclaimed himself caliph in Damascus. Another period of turmoil was brewing in the Caliphate of the Righteous, and seven years later, Mervan too met his end there. It is interesting to note that amongst his opponents during the civil war was a Slavic warrior with a name that can be

read [18]as Solnoslav ('Glorifier of the Sun') – a horseman and commander of a detachment. Whether this Slavic warrior fought against Mervan ibn Muhammad out of loyalty to his Arab patron or to take revenge on the invader Mervan for the ravaged lands of his homeland and the kin who had been taken captive and slaughtered – it is now impossible to know…

Following Mervan's death, the Umayyad caliphate came to an end. As is usually the case when a dynasty comes to an end, turmoil broke out in the country, and numerous pretenders—legitimate, less so, and

simply ambitious – to claim the vacant throne. The Arabs had other things on their minds than the distant northern lands beyond the Iron Gates of Derbent.

It is not without a heavy heart, dear reader, that I turn the final page on the Arab-Khazar wars and the Slavs' involvement in them. I would even say – not without a sense of painful bewilderment. For during these wars, the Slavs proved to be excellent warriors – but only when they were not fighting for themselves. Why did Nebula's warriors not rout the Byzantines on their own soil, in Bulgaria, when they had so successfully crushed them in the Syrian desert whilst fighting under the green banner of the Caliphate? Why did they allow twenty thousand families from the banks of the Don to be taken captive? Why do the Slavs fight for the Byzantines, for the Khazars, for the Arabs – fighting and proving themselves to be remarkable warriors, whom the all-powerful rulers of the faithful cannot praise highly enough and to whom they grant great leeway, without whom the khagan is powerless against the Arab conqueror – yet they do not fight for themselves?

This question is all the more painful because its echoes resound both in the 20th century and in our own, present day. Why did an army that was by no means the worst in Europe, led by career officers, fail to cope with a rabble of deserters, Latvians, Chinese and Muslims, commanded by a half-educated apothecary? Why did Krasnov's Cossacks fight the enemies of the fatherland under the German flag? Why do those who fought Islamist bandits in Afghanistan and Chechnya only remember the dominance of exactly the same sort of bandits on the streets of their home towns on one day a year – 2 August? Why, finally, are our inventions brought to life – and turned into a source of wealth – by the Americans, the Japanese, the Koreans – anyone but us – whilst our inventors and creators spend their twilight years in poverty and obscurity?

Why? Perhaps you, the reader, can answer that. I must admit, I have never found the answer to this question.

However, setting aside this painful question, the conclusion to be drawn from the history of the Khazar-Slavic alliance's resistance to the Arabs in the Caucasus is simple – the jihad was successfully halted at that time. The immature statehood of pagan Khazaria proved to be just as insurmountable an obstacle to the Muslim conquerors as the Catholic Frankish kingdom of Charles Martel. And in this, credit is due, among others, to the Slavic warriors of the Khaganate. Unlike the Franks, we do not know the names of our own Rolands. But

even if the Slavic Roncesvalles – where twenty thousand Slavic families fell, shielding south-eastern Europe with their bodies and lives from the Arabian sandstorm, from the terrible choice between annihilation and assimilation into the Muslim world – remains nameless for ever, it did indeed exist. The peoples of Eastern Europe were saved from enslavement, from conversion to a foreign faith (or death – as you and I, dear reader, will recall, Islam did not and does not provide for any other options for pagans) and, finally, from complete assimilation into the faceless Islamic community, the ummah. Just compare the Muslims of Central Asia and North Africa – how many differences will you find? And then compare, say, Russians with Ukrainians – or even a Russian Pomor with a fellow Russian from Siberia or a Don Cossack. And realise just how powerful the levelling force of Muhammad's teachings was.

The fate of those tens of thousands of Slavs who went on campaigns under the green banner of the rulers of the faithful, however, is an entirely different historical lesson. The Don Slavs, descendants of the Ant pioneers, remained nameless – yet the Don remains to this day the 'Slavic River'. The names Nebula and Solnoslav have been preserved in history – yet their descendants vanished without a trace into the dark copper of the Arabian deserts. Which of the present-day inhabitants of Iraq, Lebanon and Syria are descendants of the warrior who 'glorified the Sun' remains as much a mystery as the names of his tribesmen, exterminated by Mervan. Any attempt to assimilate into this culture, civilisation and religion – which are alien to us – can only end in the loss of our very selves, a complete and irretrievable dissolution – as if in a pool of acid belonging to a Middle Eastern dictator.

And this is a lesson we, too, must remember today. We are told that we share a common enemy with the Arab world. 'Yes,' I reply, 'the Slavic chieftain Nebula shared a common enemy with them twelve centuries ago.' Exactly the same – sated and insolent, just as hypocritically self-assured, convinced of his global mission, of his divine election and uniqueness, and just as unwilling to recognise anyone or anything but himself.

There are 'allies' with whom it is better not to join forces, even in the face of such an enemy.

Chapter 5
Tales of the Slavic Caucasus

A former mullah and friend of Pushkin. Adyghe songs about the heroes of the Ants. 'The Time of Busovo'. Kagan Bayan, Lavrita and Mezanmir. The Padishah-Thunderer from Chechen legends. Perun in the Caucasus. Bread, barrels and the copper sky. An Armenian historian defends Prince Kiy. Khazar fantasies. An Armenian doctor's seriously ill patient. The days of brotherhood are drawing to a close.

Deeds of days long past,
Legends of times long gone.

A.S. Pushkin, 'Ruslan and Lyudmila'

The tale of the Slavs on the battlefields of the young Khazar Khaganate, pitted against the increasingly powerful Arab Caliphate, ended on a sombre note. And before moving on to the next narrative—which, alas, is also not particularly cheerful—let us pause, dear reader, if only briefly, on something that will not cast a shadow over our vision: the mark left by the pagan Slavs on the culture of the tribes and peoples of the Caucasus Mountains.

I have already spoken of the Adyghe legends concerning the bogatyrs of the Ants clan and of how these bogatyrs fought against the Goths and Huns, the Avars and the Byzantines. This was first recounted by Shora Bekmurzich Nogmov, a Kabardian by ethnicity and a former mullah, in his article 'The Legends of the Adyghe Are Not Without Value for the History of Russia', which was published in 1850 in the journal *Moskovityanin*. Whilst Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin was staying in Pyatigorsk – and here we return to the golden age of Russian literature – Nogmov collected Adyghe tales, songs and legends for the great Russian poet; in turn, Alexander Sergeyevich helped the Adyghe man to become familiar with the Russian

language and guided the style of his translations. As for the traditions he recorded and published, they appear, by all accounts, to date back to time immemorial. The Adyghe, according to some scholars, are descendants of the Meotians, known even to Herodotus, whose territories extended as far as the Sea of Azov – a body of water named ‘Meotida’ by Hellenic sailors after them – from the direction of the Ciscaucasia. And their legends reflect the names, resonating with the mists of antiquity, of the former masters of the Black Sea steppes and foothills – the ‘kimirgen’ (Cimmerians) and the ‘sharmat’ (Sarmatians). They also remembered the ‘Turguts’ – the Uturgurs, a Hunnic-Bulgarian tribe that roamed the Azov region as far back as the time of Attila’s ancestors, whom Adyghe legends referred to as Adil; the ‘Khazars’; the Russian Tmutarakan, which they called Tmutarakan; and ‘Kosiricha’, that is, a Caesar named Justin – most likely our old acquaintance Justinian II, who spent several years in exile on the shores of the Meotida. They also remembered the Ants – in their legends, the following figures appear time and again:
‘an Ant youth’, ‘an Ant prince’s son’, ‘an Ant horseman’. It is highly significant that the Ants left a legacy across vast swathes of Europe – from the Alpine hamlets of Central Europe, where their name came to be used in Tyrolean legends to refer to legendary giants[19] , the first masters of the land (moreover, the word
‘enta’, meaning a forest giant, found its way into the Anglo-Saxon
Beowulf, and from there… into Professor J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*), all the way to the Adyghe auls in the foothills of the Caucasus.

Incidentally, the Adyghe epic recounts in detail the story of three Ant heroes: Busa, Lavrita—the one who gave such a proud reply to the Avar envoys—and Mezanmir Idarich, who was slain by the Avars.

Jordanes, a historian of the Germanic tribe of the Goths, recounts in his book on the origins and deeds of the Goths how, during the reign of King Vinitar (a nickname literally meaning ‘Slaughterer of the Veneti’, that is, the Wends, a Slavic people), seventy elders of the Ants, led by Prince Bos and his sons, were taken captive and brutally executed: ‘He marched his army into the lands of the Ants and, upon entering them, was defeated in the first battle; but thereafter he acted more decisively and had their king, Bos, along with his sons and seventy elders, crucified as a warning, so that the corpses of those crucified might heighten the fear of the subjugated.’ The Russian ‘The Tale of Igor’s Campaign’ states: ‘The fair Gothic maidens sang upon the shores of the blue sea, ringing

with Rus' gold: they sing of Busa's time, they cherish vengeance against Sharokany." Here, three historical events are brought together: the 'Gothic maidens' rejoice at the capture of the Slavic prince, Igor Svyatoslavich, the hero of the 'Tale', comparing his fate to that of the Slavic prince Busa-Bosa, who was once captured by their forefather, and they expect that the Polovtsian khan Konchak, who has taken Igor captive, will ultimately make the captive's fate mirror that which befell the ruler of the Ants, avenging his grandfather, Khan Sharukan, who was taken captive and executed by Russian warriors. Busa, who was killed by the Goths—the 'Guti'—is referred to as Baksan in the songs of the Adyghe. Nogmov translated the lament for his sister's prince of the Ants, who had been treacherously slain by his enemies: 'Busa's heroism illuminates the Ants people with his valour. O homeland of Busa, though he is no longer among the living, when the Gut comes to plunder you – do not yield!

The whole people revered him for his noble spirit: when the battle began and the blows flashed like lightning, his presence instilled confidence in the Ant people.

The Guts' atrocities show no sign of ceasing; the entire Ant people have been driven to despair, for eight pairs of oxen brought his body back to his homeland."

Another Slavic hero, Lavrita, was known to the Adyghe as Lavristan. According to the song, he included captives from the Byzantine provinces of Moesia (the lands of modern-day Bulgaria) and Dacia (now the site of Romania) in the kalym for his bride (though, of course, Antian legends used a different, Slavic term for the bride price – 'veno'). He made expeditions to Rus' (presumably the Danubian region). The story that immortalised the name of Lavrita-Lavristan, as recounted by Adyghe bards, bears such a striking resemblance to that of the Byzantine historian Menander – who has handed down to us the name of the Slavic chieftain – that it is simply astonishing. Just as the chronicler of Eastern Rome did, the Adyghe singers recounted that the envoys of the Avar khagan

'Baikan' – the very same Bayan who boasted of his indifference to the fate of his Slavic warriors – demanded tribute from Lavrita-Lavristan. The prince and the junior chieftains refused them, 'replying with proud and harsh words'. At this point, Menander reports on Lavrita's 'insolent and haughty' words, which I have quoted above. The arrogant steppe dwellers, in turn, began to talk back – and so enraged the Slavs that the latter, forgetting the sacred inviolability of envoys, slaughtered them.

Having gained a pretext for war, the Avar ruler marched his hordes towards the Danube, and Lavrita perished whilst defending his land.

Another Slavic chieftain of that time—Mezanmir Idarich[20]—was also slain at the hands of the Avar Bayan; Adyghe legends honour him as ‘Maremikho, son of Idar’. It was precisely this leader who perished whilst on a diplomatic mission to the Avars – a certain enemy of the Ants named Kotragig had whispered to the khagan that, by killing the prince, it would be much easier to subdue the Ants.

Alas, the scoundrel turned out to be absolutely right. ‘From that time on, the Avars began to ravage the land of the Ants even more than before, ceaselessly plundering it and enslaving its inhabitants,’ concludes the chronicler of Eastern Rome in his account of these events.

It is curious that the remnants of the Avars, in Europe after the fall of the Khaganate were simply slaughtered by their frenzied vassals (‘and they perished as if they were game’, notes the chronicler), survived in Dagestan – they are the well-known Avar people, who later became famous not so much for their military achievements as for their excellent armsmiths –
‘Avar helmets’ are mentioned in *The Tale of Igor’s Campaign*.

However, even more fascinating is the mark that proximity to the Slavs left on the folklore of another Caucasian people – the Chechens. Their legends mention a certain Pir’o or Pir’on Padchah (Padishah). In the first of these, he is directly attributed with the divine power of the Creator: ‘People say,’ goes the Chechen legend, ‘that Pir’on Padchah created the heavens and the earth. It takes a long time to climb up to the heavens. So much so that if you were to drive a donkey up to the heavens, it would take so long that a three-year-old donkey would die of old age upon its return.’ The second legend, however, contrasts Pirion with a ‘god’ – whether Allah or the Vainakhs’ own deity. Few people realise that the Chechens, who have now become almost the face – and, it must be said, a very unpleasant face – of the Islamic world, were pagans as recently as two centuries ago and worshipped their tribal gods. ‘Pirion argued with God. At the edge of the universe, he built bronze canopies resembling the heavens. Along them he rolled barrels with a clatter, pouring water from them.’ The third tale goes:
‘Pirion created the copper vaults of the heavens. He made women climb up onto these homemade vaults of the heavens and pour water from there.’ Sometimes he is called the son of Sela – the Vainakh Thunderer. There are also legends about how Pirion brought the first

mill from the underworld, and about how this formidable ruler held the elderly in high regard, loved children and held bread in the utmost esteem, punishing anyone who showed it disrespect severely. Naturally, the first two commandments are quite understandable and natural for Chechens, who to this day live according to a clan-based social structure; but the commandment regarding love for bread is not particularly typical for a mountain people whose main means of subsistence were hunting, cattle-breeding and raiding their neighbours.

The Leningrad scholar L.S. Klein compared these legends with Slavic tales about Perun, the god of thunder. He produced thunder and lightning, sending rain down to earth with the help of 'cloud maidens', whom the Slavs called vilas or bereginas (these are the women whom 'Pirion-padchak' forced to pour water from the copper heavens). The connection between the vilas and rain was inseparable – on the headdresses of 12th-century Old Russian women, the rasyna chains, depicting rain and hanging down on either side of the face, ended in pendants known as kolts, on which vilas were depicted – birds with maiden-like faces. Most astonishing of all is that craftsmen, living in a country that had been Christian for more than a century, dared not only to depict pagan demigoddesses, similar to the Apsaras who were subject to the Indian God of Thunder – Indra – but even
'sacrilegiously' encircled their lovely heads with HALOES. According to Belarusian folklore, Perun flies through the sky astride a millstone, whilst a Slovak legend recounts how severely he punishes those who treat bread with disrespect. Once upon a time, so the legend goes, bread grew along the entire length of the wheat ear, from the ground to the top. And so it remained until one day, whilst harvesting the grain, a foolish woman took her child with her – but had not brought a clean cloth, and when the baby soiled his nappy, she wiped his bottom with the ears of wheat. Enraged, Perun turned the woman who had desecrated the grain into a stone pillar, whilst a fierce storm arose and began to strip the grains from the ears. But then a dog intervened and begged the fearsome god to leave at least as many grains on the ear as the length of its nose. Since then, the legend goes, people have been eating the 'dog's share' of the bread.

The 'copper sky' is also mentioned in Russian legends, spiritual verses and incantations: 'I shall rise… having blessed myself, and go, having crossed myself, into the open field; I shall wash myself with dew and the bright dawn, dry myself with the red sun, gird myself with the bright moon, adorn myself with countless tiny stars, and cover myself with the copper sky.' An Orthodox warrior asked the Christian God

and the ‘heavenly commander’ Michael the Archangel, the Orthodox warrior asked to be shielded by an ‘iron and copper sky’. Could it be that the Christian archistrategos of the angelic hosts is substituting for a pagan Heavenly Warrior in this incantation?

Even the barrels that the women of Pirion rolled across the copper sky appear in the legend for a reason, and not without a connection to Perun. In honour of the Thunderer, using his ritual weapon – the mace – dashing young men in the villages of Khorutansk would attempt, whilst in the saddle, to knock down and smash an old barrel suspended in the main village square from an old lime tree revered throughout the district. Meanwhile, the villagers stood around and sang ritual songs. And in 1358, the people of Novgorod
‘agreed amongst themselves with a kiss of the cross that they would not partake in *devilish revelry* nor strike the barrels’. Since the pagan gods of their ancestors had become ‘devils’ to the baptised Christians – ‘the gods of the pagans are devils!’ (Deut. 32:16–17, Ps. 105:37, 1 Cor. 10:10), including Perun himself – Jacob the Monk wrote in his ‘Eulogy to Prince Vladimir’:
‘The pagan gods, or rather demons – Perun, Khers, and many others’ – and so the rites in their honour became ‘demonic revelries’. A. Afanasyev, in his *Poetic Views of the Slavs on Nature*, compared these two accounts, concluding that they referred to a ritual in honour of Perun, in which the barrel symbolised his thunderclouds, full of the intoxicating moisture of rain.

Finally, the people of Armenia have preserved an intriguing legend from the time of their close proximity to the Slavs. The 7th-century historian Zenobius Glaccus, in his *History of Taron*, tells us the following: there were three brothers, one named Kuar, another Meltei, and the third Khorean. ‘Kuar founded the city of Kuar, whilst Meltei founded his city in the plain and named it Meltei, and Khorean founded his city in the land of Paluni and named it after himself, Khorean. And as time went by… Kuar, Meltei and Khorean climbed Mount Karkey and found a splendid spot there, for it offered ample space for hunting and a cool climate, as well as an abundance of grass and trees. And there they built a settlement, and they erected two idols.”

For many years, this account by a medieval Armenian author remained well outside the field of vision of researchers studying the Slavs and the origins of Rus’. Well, as Kozma Faddeich Prutkov once remarked, a specialist is like flux – his knowledge is one-sided; sometimes a fresh perspective from an amateur proves useful,

capable of giving a new direction to the specialists' research, provided they are able to turn their gaze in that direction. In 1928, N.Y. Marr, a researcher who was, to put it mildly, highly idiosyncratic, and whose place in science was, by and large, entirely determined by how skilfully he adapted his intellectual constructs to the 'party line', made an observation which, despite all his other work—which at times bordered on charlatanism and eccentricity—is capable of immortalising his name. He compared the legend recounted by Zenobius Glaccus with… the legend
in the *Tale of Bygone Years* concerning the founding of Kyiv. Quar reminded him of Kyi, Meltei of Shchek [21], and Khoriv (referred to as Khoriev in some manuscripts of the chronicle) of Khorian. The land of Paluni, where the brothers Quar, Meltei and Khorean lived and settled, clearly resembled the land of the Polans, where Kyi ruled with his brothers. Even the mention, immediately following the account of Kuar's founding, of 'a multitude of trees' and rich hunting grounds found a complete, almost verbatim parallel in the legend recorded by the Russian chronicler: 'And they built a city in the name of
their eldest brother and named it after him – Kyiv. And there was a great forest and pinewood near the city, and there were hunting grounds for game.' Boris Alexandrovich Rybakov took up and expanded upon N. Ya. Marr's observation, noting that even the order of the narrative in the two legends is identical: first, the brothers' individual settlements are listed (in our chronicle, these are the hills of what would become Kyiv: Shchekovitsa, which still bears that name today, and Khorivitsa, the location of which has yet to be determined by researchers). Then there is mention of their founding of a single city. And, finally, of the forest beneath the walls of the young settlement and the hunting grounds within that forest.

I, for my part, would add one more similarity: in chronicles stemming from the Novgorod tradition, immediately following the account of the founding of the town, the forest and the 'hunting grounds' beneath it, it is noted: 'They were pagans and offered sacrifices to lakes, wells and plants, just like other pagans'. In other manuscripts, the language is even harsher: 'They were, indeed, infidels and devoted much care to their idols.' Of course, one might attribute these remarks to the Novgorodians' desire to take a dig at the haughty Kievanites – it is no coincidence that the Kievan chronicler, at the very point where his Novgorodian colleagues reported, not without schadenfreude, on the 'idolatrous' zeal of the founders of the 'mother of Russian cities', as if taking offence on behalf of his ancestors, instead declares: 'Those men were wise and discerning, and

were called the Polans'. There is no doubt that the Novgorod chroniclers wished to sting the people of Kyiv – it is no coincidence that they 'transformed' Kyi, his brothers and sister into outcasts (almost as far back as the time of Oleg the Prophet), portraying them as the forebears of the Novgorodians, the robbers[22] . But there is one
'minor detail' which, on the one hand, undermines the Novgorodians' attempts to 'rejuvenate' the capital of Rus' to the utmost, and on the other, prevents one from interpreting the mention of the brothers' worship of pagan idols as merely another dig in the Novgorod–Kyiv rivalry. Namely – at this very point, following the account of dense forests and hunting grounds, Zenobius Glaccus speaks… of the idols erected by the brothers.

There's simply no getting away from talking about coincidental similarities or coincidences here. Good heavens – the names of two of the three brothers (in sound and meaning – and the third too), the name of the land and the city they founded, and finally, the content and sequence of the four parts of the legend (about the brothers' separate lives, their founding of a city on a mountain, hunting in the forests and the worship of idols) – such coincidences simply do not happen! Meanwhile, many people nowadays wish to distance themselves from the founder of Kyiv. Some claim that Kyi and his brothers are a literary invention, the product of a monk-chronicler's imagination, and that his very name derives from the name of Kyiv. By the logic, if I may say so, of these people, does the name Yuri derive from the name of the city of Yuryev – now known as Tartu? But now, thanks to the Ukrainian émigré Omelian Pritsak, many have become enamoured with the idea that the name Kyiv… is of Khazar origin! The Arab al-Masudi mentioned the commander of the Muslim forces of the Khazar Khaganate (this was in the 10th century), who held the rank of vizier and was named Ahmad ibn Kuya, that is, the son of Kuya. To some scholars, everything immediately became clear – it was this Khazar's father, this very same, excuse me, Kuya, who founded Kyiv!

There is no archaeological or other evidence to suggest, let alone that the Khazars founded Kyiv, that there was ever any significant Khazar community in the city on the Dnieper. The name 'Kozary' – whether referring to a district or a street in medieval Kyiv – would rather suggest that the Kyiv Khazars were few in number and alien to the people of Kyiv (after all, Ordynka Street is not located in Saray-Batu, but in Moscow, which was by no means founded by the Horde, just as the 'German Court' in Novgorod does not at all imply that it was founded by people from Germany). It would suggest,

I repeat, since the connection between this name and the Khazars has yet to be proven – all manner of ‘Kozars’ are generously scattered across the map of Slavic Europe in those regions where no native of the Khaganate has ever set foot. These names derive from the word ‘kozar’ – a goat herder, a shepherd of goats. It may well be that the Kozars of Kyiv share the same root.

Completely off the mark – including in relation to Kyiv – are arguments regarding the Khazar origin of such place-names in the medieval capital of Rus’ as Pasyncha Beseda or Kopyrev Konets. Both sound entirely Slavic, and to equate the Slavic word ‘Pasyncha’ (from ‘pasynok’ – a term used in Rus’ not only for adopted children but also for junior members of the prince’s or boyar’s retinue) into some Turkic word, never attested by anyone, or to derive ‘Kopyrev Konets’ from the Turkic tribe of the Kabars – a subject we shall return to later – amounts to substituting science with fortune-telling from coffee grounds.

Furthermore, there is absolutely no basis whatsoever for believing that the father of the commander of the Muslim army of Khazaria – an army which, as our contemporary and fellow tribesman al-Masudi, the famous Ibn Fadlan, kindly informs us, consisted of mercenaries – ever set foot on the banks of the Dnieper. What is more, the leader of the mercenaries was most likely a mercenary himself, and his father could well have been some peaceful native of Khwarezm or Persia, mending shoes, sitting in a shop or swinging a heavy hoe over a field sparsely irrigated by warm water from an irrigation channel, and never even having heard of such a river as the Dnieper. The theory that the name of the ancient Russian capital derives from a name that sounds jarring to Slavic ears is based – or, more accurately, precariously balanced – on a single phonetic similarity. And I, the reader, am truly unable to understand how such ‘scientific’ methods differ from the notorious search for the ‘Russian Etruscans’.

What is more, the name Kiy, which among the common people was shortened to Kiyko or Kiyashki, remained in everyday use amongst the Russians right up until Peter the Great’s reforms, when non-calendar names were finally outlawed, turning them into despised nicknames. It remained in common use among the Poles until around the same time, whilst place names derived from this name – Kievy, Kievtsy, Kievki, Kievichi and so on and so forth,

and so on – are found in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, the Czech Republic, and the lands of the Polabian Slavs. The Bulgarian researcher Kovachev has counted around eighty such names across the lands of the Slavic peoples – and in all likelihood, this is not the full list. None of them, of course, have the slightest connection to the father of the Khazar mercenary; rather, they derive directly from the Slavic name Kiy. Why, then, should the name of their 'namesake' on the Dnieper have a different origin?

And the legend recounted by Zenobius Glaccus ought to have finally granted eternal rest to the ill-fated ghost of the unknown Kuyi, whose memory is needlessly disturbed by scholars. If the legend of the founders of Kyiv dates from the time of the Khazar Khaganate, then the relatives of that khaganate's commanders, who lived three hundred years after Glaccus, certainly cannot have had any connection with its foundation. Yes, reader, once again I use the phrase 'would have': scholars are a stubborn lot, and once they have managed to devise a theory that strikes them as elegant, and to cite it a good two dozen times – from an article into a book, from a book into an article – then trifles such as facts, evidence from sources or common sense can scarcely penetrate their consciousness. You, dear reader, may think I am being mocking, but here is the opinion of the eminent linguist V.N. Toporov: 'It is clear that from this point of view (regarding Kuy – the founder of Kyiv. – *O. V.*) the Armenian legend of the three brothers (one of whom, Kuar, is identified with Kyiv), as recounted by Zenobius Glaccus, must be revised." I do not know about you, dear reader, but to me it is utterly baffling – how can the direct testimony of an independent source be 'reconsidered'? And for what purpose – for the sake of that same ill-fated patronymic of the commander of the Khazar Muslims? For the sake of a single phonetic similarity? And yet this is written by a scholar, a linguist… one cannot help but conclude that the utmost downplaying of the role of the Slavs, and the attribution of all their achievements to foreigners, is the main criterion of 'scientific rigour' these days. Because 'scientific' arguments about Kuyia and Kyiv, really, differ from the studies of the ever-memorable Vasily Kirillich Trediakovsky – with his 'Kholodonia' and 'Gat' Malaya' – only in that they do not attempt to glorify the Slavs.

Another author, A.S. Korolev, whilst approaching the idea of a Khazar founder of Kyiv with reasonable scepticism, falls into the opposite extreme. I really do not know what it is that our learned gentlemen find so objectionable

the founder of the ‘mother of Russian cities’ so displeased our learned gentlemen, but one can only marvel at the tenacity with which they attempt to portray him as either a foreigner or, indeed, a mere literary mirage, a fiction. Korolev, for example, whilst not denying the striking similarity between the legend from the *History of Taron* and the account in the *Tale of Bygone Years*, concludes that… the chronicler simply copied the story of the founding of Kyiv from Armenian books.

What can one say here – save to recall a certain story that took place in that very Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, where the *Tale of Bygone Years* was compiled, which tells us of Kie and his ‘brotherhood’ during those very years, as described in the ‘Kiev-Pechersk Paterikon’ by almost the very same monk who compiled the chronicle. The monk Agapit, renowned for his righteous life, fell gravely ill. Prince Vladimir Monomakh of Kiev sent his finest court physician to him. Whilst the doctor was examining the patient, the latter, in turn, scrutinised the stranger and, unable to contain himself any longer, asked warily:

‘Who are you, and what is your faith?’ The prince’s physician, accustomed to being known and recognised by all, was astonished and replied, not without a touch of vanity: ‘Have you not heard of me? I am an Armenian.’ At that, the gravely ill monk cried out:

‘How dare you desecrate my cell and take me by my sinful hand?! Begone, heretic and infidel!’ ‘And the Armenian, put to shame, departed,’ – the narrator notes with satisfaction – a monk of the Caves himself, just like the principled Agapit.

And so this distinguished author, a scholar and specialist in Kievan Rus’, attempts to convince us that in a monastery where a monk would not even wish to see an Armenian in his cell—even as a deliverer from a serious, perhaps fatal, illness—they read the works of ‘heretics and godless men’ in search of information about the origins of their native city, a city from which the baptism of Rus’ began, and the location of their monastery? I do not know about you, reader, but I find it easier to imagine that the monks of the Caves were studying the genealogy of their ‘Saviour’ using the Jewish Talmud!

Incidentally, the chronicler explicitly names the source of the tale about Kyi and his brothers as: ‘as they say’. Not simply ‘they say’ – that would have been rendered by the words ‘glagolahu’ or ‘reche’ – but specifically ‘they say’ – recounted, as epics or fairy tales are recounted. Kyi was a hero of local legends, which the chronicler diligently recorded, –

otherwise, as B.A. Rybakov aptly pointed out, there would have been no point in him admitting that he did not know (‘ne svemy’) which particular Caesar Prince Kiy had gone to see in Tsargrad-Constantinople. He could easily have inserted anyone he liked into the story he had composed – be it Justinian, Theodosius the Great, or even Constantine himself, the founder of the Second Rome. But since the Caesar’s name is not mentioned – it follows that the legend was recorded without speculation or alteration. ‘Folklore,’ some snob might say with a contemptuous curl of the lip. Well, oral traditions are not the worst way of preserving information about the past. Nor are they by any means the least reliable – one need only recall the story of Ólav Alvkonung. Snorri Sturluson recounts his story in his *Saga of the Ynglingar* in the 13th century, whilst the konung himself lived as far back as the Great Migration; and, of course, Snorri had no source other than folklore to draw upon in his account of him. Nevertheless, when a burial mound was excavated in Sweden in the 20th century – a mound which the Icelander (!) Snorri had identified as the grave of Ólav, who, according to him, was tall and died because his leg had become diseased – the skeleton of a nobleman of that era was found, with severely deformed bones in his left leg. Why, then, could the legends recorded by Nestor in Kyiv two centuries before Snorri not be just as reliable? This is further supported by the striking similarity between the account of the legend included in Glaccus’s *History of Taron* and the way the same legend is recounted in the *Tale of Bygone Years*. If the legends have not changed significantly over the nearly half a thousand years separating Glaccus’s Zenobius from the Pechersk monk, then one can safely assume that they changed no more during the period from the city’s foundation to the writing of the *History of Taron*.

But how did this legend find its way to the Armenian historian? The late Academician B.A. Rybakov suggested in his time that we owe this precisely to the Slavic settlers captured by Mervan. Fortunately, Kakheti, where the Arab commander settled twenty thousand families of his captives, is situated right on the border with Armenia. However, since Slavs had appeared in Armenia even before that – let us recall once more the siege of Partava – there is hardly any need to dwell on the brief saga of the unfortunate captives of the Muslim conqueror. It is worth noting, however, that L.S. Klein also links the emergence among the Chechens of legends about Pir-o-Pirone to these very events – the siege of Partava and the capture of the Slavs

from the Don – that L.S. Klein also links the emergence among the Chechens of the legends about Pir-o-Pirone.

The legends of the Caucasus have preserved the memory of the pagan Slavs who came to its foothills centuries before Yermolov, Pushkin or Tolstoy.

Let us finally turn to yet another legend, one that no longer pertains to Slavic folklore proper. This legend is recounted to us by Arab historians.

A legend about the times when the Rus', the Khazars and the Saklab (Slavs) were brothers.

Perhaps the memory of those times is preserved in the Russian epics about the bogatyr Mikhail Kazarin [23]or the epics about a prince with the strange, non-Russian name of Saur, who ruled the kingdom of Alybersk (very similar to Alburz – the Persian name for modern-day Mount Elbrus).

Those times were drawing to a close.

Chapter 6
‘The Renewed’ Khazaria

Khorezm in flames. The Rakhdonites. Bulan’s choice. Civil war in the Khaganate. ‘May your eye show them no mercy.’ Woe to the vanquished!

May you live in an age of change!

The Eastern Curse

Once again, we must turn our thoughts to lands far from the Caucasus – what can one do? Everything on our earth is interconnected, and anyone who wishes to limit themselves to studying the history of a single region will not even be able to understand it. It all began in distant Khorezm, which was not yet Muslim – the Khorezmians of that time, like the Persians, practised Zoroastrianism. At the end of the 7th century, the region was shaken by civil war. Khurzad was striving for power – a relative of the Khorezm Shah on his father’s side and the grandson of an elder of the Rahdonite community, a group of Jewish merchants and moneylenders, on his mother’s side. He was backed by all the Rahdonites of Khorezm and the sect of the heretic Mazdak. The Mazdakites spoke of the equality of all before God and deduced from this the necessity of equality on earth. And to ensure there was no inequality, it was necessary to take everything away from those who possessed anything and distribute it amongst those who had nothing. And like a sinister spectre – not a ghost of the dead past, but a shadow of a dreadful future – the banner of Mazdak loomed over the hordes of rabble, scum and scoundrels who had flocked from all quarters to Khurzad. It was crimson-red, bearing the Shield of Solomon – a five-pointed star.

In theory, the Mazdakites’ ideas might have sounded quite good, but in the backward, medieval, illiterate Khorezm there were far too few scholars capable of preferring the beauty of theory to what their eyes saw and their ears heard. Nor were there yet any newspapers, telegraphs or radio capable of outpacing the refugees scattering in all directions from the towns and villages captured by Khurzad. And the faces of the Khorezmians darkened as they listened to the survivors’ tales of the irrigation channels, red with the blood of those who had not

wish to hand over to Khurzad's bandits what they had earned through sweat and blood. And of how their daughters and wives, passed round in a circle, screamed, moaned and gasped before falling silent forever. For women, too, are property. And property must be shared. So decreed the teacher Mazdak. So commanded the leader Khurzad.

The most observant spoke of the houses of moneylenders and slave-traders that had survived in the ravaged cities. All the property seized from the 'enemies of truth' was brought there, awaiting the final division following complete victory. The relatives of Khurzad's mother were growing rich amidst the ashes and ruins.

And the sullen dehkhanin gripped the hilt of his heavy ketmen in a different way. And the noble bagadur walked in silence to saddle his horse.

Khorezm rose up. All of it. There was no mercy – the avengers marched past the dried-up irrigation channels in the barren fields, past the rotting carcasses of unharvested livestock and the desecrated bodies of women decaying beside them, past the plane trees hung with the corpses of 'Mazdak's enemies of truth' and their kin, regardless of gender or age. There was no mercy – and the first to realise this were those who had been profiting from the dying cities. From the east, the frenzied Khorezmians were advancing; to the north lay the Aral Sea; and from the south, the Caliphate's cavalry was already sweeping in on a samum that had blown in from the Arabian deserts. That left the west; fortunately, there, on the Lower Volga and in the North Caucasus, the Rakhdonites had long-standing ties – the nomads sold them their spoils and slaves for a song. Mazdak's bloodstained rags were still fluttering above the perishing bands when the last caravan, heavily laden with chests containing their spoils, crossed the western border of Khorezm. Khurzad's rabble had served their purpose and were no longer of any interest to those who were their true masters.

In their new homeland, the Khorezmian Rakhdonites did not even recall Mazdak's egalitarian ideas. A trinket for fools – and if any of them had chased after it and were now feeding the crows in the smouldering ruins of Khorezm, so much the better for the tribe. The tribe? This corporation of moneylenders and slave-traders, whose tentacles stretched from the Iranian highlands to Albion, was neither a tribe – although it consisted solely of Jews – nor a religion – although it was founded on the laws of the Talmud. Rather, it was a colossal mafia 'family'. When necessary, it sacrificed both its 'fellow tribesmen' and its 'fellow believers'. Its earthly sanctity lay in Profit and Power.

In Khazaria, there were as yet no crowds of half-starved rabble or gluttonous rich men. Mazdak's ideas did not lead to power here, nor did they bring profit. Here, courage and noble lineage were valued. Well, there were indeed brave warriors who distinguished themselves in battles against the Arabs, and beautiful wives for the tribal princes. According to the laws of the Talmud, the son of a Jewish woman was considered a Jew, regardless of who had fathered him. And so the young princes grew up, regarded by everyone around them as Khazars, whilst their mothers raised them as sons of Israel.

Soon, another Khazar military leader, Bulan, converted to Judaism and married Serah, the daughter of a Rahdonite elder. His son, Ras-Tarkhan, followed suit. His grandson already bore the Jewish name Obadiah. Centuries later, Kagan-Bek Joseph, a descendant of Obadiah, would write to his Spanish co-religionist Hasdai ibn Shaprut, a courtier of the Emir of Córdoba:

'Obediah renewed the kingdom and strengthened the faith in accordance with the law and the rules. He built houses of assembly (synagogues) and houses of learning (heders) and gathered together the sages of Israel.'

Byzantine and Armenian chroniclers, and, in particular, the land itself, have preserved evidence that allows us, so to speak, to substantially supplement this peaceful picture.

Now it was not in Khorezm, but within the Khaganate itself that civil war was raging. The old pagan nobility had not come to terms with the establishment of Judaism as the state religion. And the issue here was not some particular form of anti-Semitism on the part of the Khazar nobility. Rather, it was a matter of the hatred felt by the Rakhdonite Jews towards paganism—a hatred rooted in the prohibitions of the Old Testament, its uncompromising demands not to worship idols, to smash idols, to topple pillars, to cut down sacred groves and to overturn altars. Soothsayers and fortune-tellers were to be driven out, stoned to death, and cut to pieces. The Rakhdonites did not seek to convert the entire Khazar people to their faith, but they certainly demanded that their Khazar descendants observe these commandments. And it is unlikely that the priests and those Khazars who had not intermarried with the Rakhdonites were delighted to see that those they regarded as brothers had begun to shun the rites of the Khazar gods and destroy the statues of their ancestors.

The war was merciless, and both sides suffered losses. Obadiah lost both his son Hezekiah and his grandson Manasseh, so that after the war the throne passed to his brother, Hanukkah. But Obadiah's opponents were doomed. The country's new rulers stood as a solid wall around the throne of the khagan, who had already converted to Judaism – and in

the eyes of the majority of the Khazars as enemies of the khagan and the khagan-bek, as traitors and rebels. They had no experience of civil war behind them. As pagans who revered their clan, they saw the new nobility as fellow tribesmen, albeit inferior ones. How were they to know that the law brought by the strangers forbade 'fellow tribesmen' from regarding them as even human beings? They tried to negotiate and swore oaths. How were they to know that the new faith explicitly imposed a duty to deceive a pagan, whilst once a year, on the joyous festival of Yom Kippur, it released one from *all* promises and oaths? They had no inkling of the most sophisticated art of intrigue, the masterful command of which would later enable their enemies' descendants to set the tributary tribes of the Khaganate against one another.

But none of that mattered.

Far more important – and far more terrifying – was the new method of waging war, unfamiliar to the steppe dwellers.

Until then, the height of cruelty in steppe warfare had been to slaughter all the men in a tribe who were shorter than the tall axle of the enormous, nearly two-metre-high wheels of the nomadic yurts. Such savage massacres were etched into the steppe dwellers' memories; they were sung about by the night-time campfire, in between tales of one-eyed cannibals and bloodthirsty undead… but even in such cases, children and women were spared to replenish the victors' harems.

And at no campfire, even on the darkest of nights, did they sing this:

'And Moses said to them, "Why have you spared all the women? Now kill all the male children and all the women…"' (Num. 31:15, 17), 'But in the towns of these peoples, which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let a single soul remain alive' (Deut. 20:16), 'And they took the town. And… everything in the town—men, women, young and old, oxen, sheep and donkeys—they put to the sword' (Joshua 6:19–20), 'David laid waste that land, sparing neither man nor woman' (1 Samuel 27:9).

One could go on and on with quotations, but to what end? Who takes pleasure in savagely revelling in the bloodiest scenes of violence and slaughter? Whose souls will be soothed by the voluptuous refrain: 'not a single soul was left alive; he left no one who might have survived and escaped; he put everything that breathed to the sword'?

On the wretched land of the Khazars, the monstrous traditions of the Old Testament were once again clothed in blood-soaked flesh. Oh, the new Khazar

of Khazaria remembered, remembered well, and did not repeat the mistakes of its great-grandfathers. There were no refugees from the rebellious cities captured by Obadiah's armies. More than a thousand years later, archaeologists unearthed their ruins – the so-called Semikarakorsk and Pravoberezhnoe Tsimlyansk fortified settlements. And heaps of bones.

What did the families of the defenders expect when the victors rushed in through the breaches in the walls? Captivity, plunder, humiliation? Did they mourn their loved ones, prepare to search for them amongst the bodies by the walls, and hope to find them merely wounded?..

They did not know that they would not have to search for anyone…

'So they slaughtered them all, leaving not a single soul behind.'

Bones, bones, bones… Not just by the walls. Not just in the streets. In every courtyard. In every house. The bones of children. The bones of women. The bones of the elderly.

'You shall utterly destroy all the peoples whom the Lord your God delivers to you; your eye must not spare them' (Deut. 7:16). This is the 'law and rule' according to which Obadiah 'renewed the kingdom and strengthened the faith'. And the 'wise men of Israel' in the 'houses of assembly' took pleasure in repeating the ancient lines from the book of the prophet Nahum: 'The horsemen charge, the sword flashes, the spears gleam; there are many slain, and heaps of corpses; there is no end to the corpses; they stumble over their own dead… even their infants are dashed to pieces at the crossroads of every street' (3:3–16) – and concluded with the triumphant words: 'Rejoice, Judah, in your festivals… for the wicked shall no longer pass through you: he is utterly destroyed!' (1:15).

In the 20th century, this would be called total war. Dresden, transformed into a monstrous furnace by the Allied bombings. The mushroom clouds over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The wings of the twentieth-century bombers bore the same symbol as that on the banners of the khaganate's new masters: the Shield of Solomon – the five-pointed star.

But Kagan-bek Obadiah had neither aeroplanes nor nuclear bombs.
So who was it who carried out these monstrous orders?

This was the second 'weapon of victory' for the new rulers. Arab travellers, as we have already mentioned in connection with Ahmad ibn Quya, make a special point of noting, as if it were a curiosity, that in the land of the Khazars the army 'receives a salary', that is to say, it consists entirely of mercenaries. Strangers or bands of outlaws. What did Khazaria, its customs, or its

ancient gods? The new masters paid them. And they did their job – the strangers indifferently, the outcasts, perhaps, even with relish.

Terror gripped the survivors. Most could not bear it – and meekly bowed to the heavy hand of their new masters. The rebellious fled, leaving in whole clans – to the Hungarians, to the Bulgarians. In Bulgaria, tales of the dreadful cannibals, the 'Dzhidovins', were told for a long time to come. It is possible that some also fled to Rus'. Velimir Khlebnikov saw a descendant of the Khazar pagans – the Khabars – in the Russian explorer Khabarov. Incidentally, these are the very same 'Khabars' – or 'Kabars' – from which certain linguists attempt to derive the name 'Kopyrev'. As we can see, this is not a 'tribe', and it is utterly pointless to infer from its supposed traces the presence in Kyiv of the victors in the civil war – the Khazar Jews.

What, then, was the fate of the Slavs in the 'renewed' Khazaria of Obadiah? The Slavs were well known for their devotion to the gods. Christian preachers compared preaching amongst our ancestors to preaching in the midst of the desert, to quote
'The Life of Saint Columbanus', who lived in the sixth and seventh centuries.
'It is not easy for this people to embrace the faith,' the life concludes. A younger contemporary of Columbanus, Bishop Amand, set out for the Danube Slavs with the aim of winning the 'palm of martyrdom' – it was evidently understood that a preacher of the Christian faith would achieve no other success amongst the Slavs. For those who are interested – Amand did not even achieve this success, although it cannot be said that the bishop did not try. Seeing 'that the fruit was not yet ripe for him', the disappointed preacher left Slavic lands. Helmold, a fellow believer of Columbanus and Amand, wrote half a millennium later: 'Of all the northern peoples, the Slavs alone were more stubborn than the others and were the last to convert to the faith.' When, in Bulgaria, the descendants of Asparukh the Bulgar began to adopt Slavic titles ('prince' instead of 'khan syubigi') and names (Malomir, Nravota, Zvenitsa – instead of Omurtag and Krum), pressure on Christians intensified. Even in Christianised Bulgaria, it was the Slavs who clung to pagan customs for the longest. It is telling that of the two sons of Simeon the Great, Tsar of Bulgaria, one, with the Bulgarian name Sursuvul, grew up to be an exemplary Christian, whilst his brother, with the Slavic name Boyan (quite possibly the very same Boyan from 'The Tale of Igor's Campaign', 'Veles's grandson' and a werewolf), although he grew up in Orthodox Constantinople, became

a sorcerer and a pagan. Even in the Islamic Caliphate, the warriors Nebula and—judging by his name—Solnoslav remained faithful to the faith of their ancestors. Only by winning over the Slavic nobility, through the use of armed force, did Christianity 'pave the way to the hearts of the Slavs' – and yet Christianity is in many ways closer to paganism than Judaism, which recognises neither the Incarnation, nor the Trinity, nor the veneration of saints.

And, it seems to me, there can be no doubt as to whose side the Slavs took in the civil war on the lands of the Khaganate. On the side of those who revered their ancestors and their gods. On the side of the defeated. It is quite possible that among those slaughtered by Kagan-Bek's mercenaries at the Semikarakorsk and Right-Bank Tsimlyansk fortified settlements were Slavic women, children and the elderly. Therefore, whilst references to the Slavs within the territory of the Khazar Khaganate do not disappear entirely—as we shall yet see—they do become much more muted. And what is said in them… well, al-Masudi—the very same man to whom we owe the account of Ben Kuyya—reports that the Slavs were 'slaves of the Khazar Khagan'. Not a very cheerful piece of news.

However, lacking a state of their own, the Slavs were unable to put up a proper fight against the army of the Kagan-Bek. And any attempts to rebel were ruthlessly suppressed. Armenian chroniclers recount one such attempt, albeit one that took place far from the Caucasus Mountains. It is generally believed that this account refers to the Savir nomads, neighbours of the Khazars; yet there are reasons – which I shall explain – to attribute the chronicle's narrative to the north, to the northerners.

The Armenian chronicler named their leader Ilutver; this name can confidently be translated as Lyutover. Lyutover resolved to rise up against the khagan. Visiting preachers from Byzantium convinced him that if he embraced Christianity, Christ and his earthly representative, the Caesar, would come to his aid.

Lyutover embraced the new faith. A bishop with the resonant name of Israel arrived from Byzantium. He personally felled the sacred oak. This is precisely why I believe we are talking about the Slavic Severians, rather than the nomadic Savirs. The latter would hardly have worshipped an oak, whereas for the Slavs the oak was a sacred symbol of Perun. What is more, this very oak was found by archaeologists in the Desna, the river of the northerners. The trunk of the oak is embedded with the fanged jaws of wild boars – the sacred beasts of Perun. There are exactly nine of these jaws, set in a square pattern within the trunk; scholars associate the number nine

specifically with the Thunderer: for instance, at Peryn, Perun's sanctuary near Novgorod, which was investigated by the archaeologist V.V. Sedov, nine bonfires burned – eight in a circle and one in the centre, before the idol of the fearsome god. The oak was felled at the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries, long before the baptism of Rus' in 988. And, in all likelihood, it was this very tree that fell victim to the fanaticism of the Byzantine preacher.

The bishop did not confine himself to destroying the Severians' sacred site. He defaced the Slavs' amulets—small swastika-shaped discs—by breaking off their prongs and turning them into ordinary crosses.

Putting his trust in new protectors, both heavenly and earthly, Lyutover declared war on the Khaganate. One can well imagine the state of mind of those men as they went into battle, with their mutilated amulets hanging from their necks, whilst before their very eyes, no doubt, the thousand-year-old tree of the god of victory was still crashing down from the cliff.

The northerners were routed. Lyutover, taken prisoner, was forced to swear a humiliating oath of submission to the khagan and to hand over his only daughter to the khagan's harem. Is this not the origin of the 'Princess of Chernigov' in the Russian epic 'Ivan Godinovich', who was betrothed to 'Tsarevich Kosherishche' [24]?

The Christian God did not send angelic hosts down from heaven to aid his new followers. The Caesar in distant Constantinople did not lift a finger to help his new co-religionists. What were the barbarian Slavs, yesterday's pagans, to him… Byzantium effectively betrayed even the Crimean Christian rebels led by John of Gothia to the Khazars.

On the other hand, the Greeks, probably, as always, have snapped up a fair number of captives whom the Khazars were driving out of the devastated and plundered lands of the Severians.

Even less able than the northerners to resist the new rulers of the Khaganate were the Don Slavs. Their strength had surely been thoroughly undermined by Mervan's 'swift raid' – the loss of twenty thousand families would be a catastrophe even by today's standards! And the Jewish uprising and civil war in Khazaria that followed shortly afterwards must have finally sapped the strength of the Don descendants of the Ants. Of the nine supreme judges of Khazaria, only one dealt with the affairs of pagans – including the Slavs. Given that as many as three judges dealt with the affairs of the small and monolithic Jewish community (a further three handled the affairs of Muslims, and two those of Christians of all churches and sects), one can well imagine the position of the pagans – including the Slavs – within

the Khaganate. However, as for foreigners – even in the ‘renewed’ Khazaria, the Khazars themselves were sometimes forced to sell their own children. That said, not everyone lived like this, of course – the Jewish elite, whom Arab authors refer to as the ‘white Khazars’, lived in blissful tranquillity, sheltered behind the mighty walls of urban fortresses
‘elite condominiums’ with shady gardens and babbling fountains. The rest, however, were left to huddle in huts, sakls and yurts, huddled like frightened sheep against the mighty white-stone walls of the fortresses, behind an almost symbolic earthen rampart, beyond which lay the lawless steppe. The ‘Black Khazars’, as the Arabs called the majority of the Khaganate’s population, were not permitted beyond the fortress walls, not even as guards. This was probably the only country in the medieval world where the guards patrolled the city fortifications *from the outside*. There is little cause for surprise at such apartheid – one need only recall that the ‘law and order’ by which Obadiah ‘renewed the kingdom’ of the Khazars included such a curious document as the ‘Laws of Ezra’. There is only one thing to be said about this remarkable legal monument: when drafting the infamous Nuremberg ‘racial laws’, the German Nazis took the ‘Laws of Ezra’ as their basis, naturally replacing ‘Jews’ with ‘Germans’ in them. And even if the Khazars – that part of them whose coarse, chiselled features had not been softened by the admixture of the blood
of the ‘people chosen by God’ and spared by the merciless southern sun, the steppe winds, grief and famine – were forced to huddle beneath the walls of fortresses and trade their own children, then one can only imagine how the Slavs lived in this state, whom al-Masudi describes as the most numerous of the pagans (read: the most disenfranchised section of the population) of the khaganate.

Although the Slavs are also mentioned as one of the peoples of the Caucasus (in 903, Ibn al-Fakih reports: ‘On Mount Kabk (the Caucasus) there are seventy-two languages; the mountain is five hundred farsangs long. It borders the land of the Greeks as far as the frontier of the Alans and extends to the land of the Slavs. There (on Mount Kabk) is also a tribe of Slavs’.” Moreover, herein lies the paradox: it was precisely these disenfranchised pagans who gave the Khazars the word ‘law’ – it is worth knowing this so that, contrary to all the latest fanciful theories, we may remember who was actually the ‘bearer of culture’ in relations between the Khazars and the Slavs; yet, as an active force, whether independently or in alliance with other

peoples, the Slavs themselves vanish from the history of the Caucasus following the ‘renewal’ of the Khazar kingdom by Obadiah.

Yet at the very same time, in the ninth and tenth centuries, on ‘Mount Kabk’, after a two-hundred-year hiatus, the name of new northern arrivals, who worshipped the same god who had entered the myths of the Caucasus as Pirkuši and Pirón, who made the city their capital—the account of whose founding was recorded by Zenobius Glaccus—and who called their rulers ‘tiuns’, just like the Slavic warriors of the khagan beneath the walls of Partava.

Rus’ had come to the Caucasus.

Part Two
Beyond the town of Tmutorokan
Rus' in the Caucasus: 9th–10th centuries

Chapter 1
Rus' merchants at Ibn Khordadbeh's customs post

An inquisitive customs officer. The Rus' and the Slavs – a curious 'division'. Rus' swords in the land of damascene blades. Who traded along the Volga route? The Baltic – the luxury of the Slavs and the poverty of Scandinavia. Camels and 'elephants' bear witness. The mysteries of Rus' Christianity. On the eve of a storm.

War, trade and piracy – three facets
of a single essence.

J.W. Goethe, 'Faust'

We have already discussed that if the Rus' were indeed in the foothills of the Caucasus in the 7th century, they could only have reached that region via a single route, known since the Neolithic, the New Stone Age: the Volga-Baltic route. As for the 9th century, there is not, and cannot be, the slightest doubt whatsoever – it was precisely along this route that the Rus' travelled eastwards. They left a substantial 'trail' along it – it was in the Volga region, or more precisely, in the lands of the Volga Bulgars, that Ibn Fadlan, the envoy of Caliph al-Muqtadir, encountered the Rus' and left us a priceless description of their appearance, customs and rituals. There, too, at the Balymer burial ground, a sword bearing a Rus' name was discovered – but more on that later.

Merchants travelled – scouting out routes, the locations of fortresses, the strength of armies, the size of the population and its readiness for war. Warriors set out – their fierce reputation deterring not only the dashing little men, but also the savages of the steppe and mountain tribes, and other rulers from reaching out their greedy hands towards the goods of the Rus' merchants.

One of the earliest – apart from the accounts of Muhammad Bal-ami, al-Salibi and the *Book of Stages* – mentions of the Rus' in the eastern lands are the notes of Ibn Khordadbeh, a customs official of the Commander of the Faithful in the city of Ray (remember, the one that once bought its freedom from the Arab conquerors?), written in the 40s of the ninth century and entitled 'The Book of Roads and States'. In the course of his duties, he himself interacted with Rus' merchants.

'As for the Russian merchants – who are a tribe of the Slavs – they export beaver fur and the fur of the black-brown fox, as well as swords, from the most remote parts of the Slavic lands… then they set sail for the Jurjan Sea (this is how the ancient name for the Caspian Sea – the Hyrcanian Sea – was altered under the pen of the Persian author. – *O. V.*) and land on whichever shore they please, selling everything they have brought with them, all of which ends up in Ray. Sometimes they transport their goods by camel from Jurjan to Baghdad, where Slavic slaves act as their interpreters. And they pass themselves off as Christians'.

In this most fascinating account, where literally every word is worth its weight in gold (especially when one considers that all this comes from an eyewitness who, on more than one occasion, personally inspected the goods of the Russian merchants, felt the furs and scrutinised the blades of their swords, and spoke to their masters through slave interpreters), there is a whole series of details useful to us that deserve closer examination. And there can be no doubt whatsoever that this relates to our topic. All sources state that Rus' boats on the Khvalyn Sea—as our ancestors called the Caspian—sailed along its western, Caucasian coast. And, of course, the most important piece of information for us – one that literally hits us in the face, the very statement with which Ibn Khordadbeh begins his account – is that the Rus' were *a Slavic tribe*! He goes on to add that the Rus' also had Slavic interpreters.

Here, of course, we must once again enter into a debate with the 'Normanists'. They indignantly declare: 'But surely the other—that is to say, the Arab—authors make a sharp distinction between the Rus' and the Slavs!

Oh, what a strange way they 'distinguish' them! The *Rus'* prince Dir, in the writings of our old acquaintance al-Masudi, is described as the 'ruler *of the Slavs*'. A whole host of Eastern authors mention *Slavia* amongst the three parts *of Rus'*, alongside Kuyava-Kyiv and the enigmatic Artania. Al-Masudi speaks of the identical funeral customs of the Rus' and the Slavs; Ibn Rustu

distinguishes them; yet, when describing the *Rus'* burial rites, he refers to the log tombs of Kyiv and Chernihiv—well known to archaeologists—which bear the closest resemblance to those found in *Slavic* Moravia. Furthermore, the examination of the skulls of the people buried in them led archaeologists to conclude that these were not simply Slavs, but a group *of Slavs* whose skull structure differed more from that of the Germanic and Scandinavian peoples than any other group. Incidentally, the Rus' burial described by Ibn Rusta almost verbatim reproduces the funeral rite described in the Russian epic
'Mikhail Potyk', in which not a hint of Scandinavian influence can be found. On the other hand, when describing *the Slavs'* funeral rites, Ibn Rusta effectively reproduces—bar a few minor details—the account given by another Arab, Ibn Fadlan, of the funeral of *a* noble… *Rus' man* that he witnessed in Bulgar!

It turns out that the Arabs distinguish between the Rus' and the Slavs only to immediately start confusing them at every turn!

Well, fine, let them distinguish between them. To be honest, the only question that springs to mind is: so what?! A whole host of historians – including Procopius of Caesarea and the Goth Jordanes – distinguish the Goths from the Germanic peoples and set them apart. Not a single ancient source refers to the Britons as Celts. Many medieval sources, just as they do with the Rus' and the Slavs, 'distinguish' between the Khazars and the Turks. Nevertheless, the Goths are a Germanic tribe, the Britons are Celts, and the Khazars are Turks. This is because the names (for the most part), customs and beliefs of the Goths are Germanic, those of the Britons are Celtic, and those of the Khazars are Turkic. After all, the terms 'Germans', 'Celts' and 'Turks' meant something quite different to their contemporaries than they do to us. And yet it is only Slavic scholars who demand that ancient authors possess a firm understanding of and correctly apply the term 'Slavs' in the generalised sense it acquired in modern-era books – centuries after their deaths! That familiar 'objectivity'.

It is worth noting that swords are mentioned as one of the goods the Rus' exported to Persia. I shall not dwell on the notion that these were Frankish-made blades, which the ubiquitous and tireless Scandinavians transported from the empire of Charlemagne's descendants across the Baltic and Eastern Europe. I shan't even mention how profitable such an enterprise would have been – swords can hardly be described as light and convenient cargo, and, to make matters worse, they are prone to rust. No sources

mention the Normans purchasing Frankish blades – but there is a decree by Charlemagne, Emperor of the Franks himself, prohibiting the sale of weapons to the Baltic Slavs. Archaeology reveals how the subjects of the most Christian Emperor complied with this ban – archaeologists have found eleven Frankish swords bearing the hallmarks of the finest craftsmen, so to speak, 'branded goods', in the lands of Kievan Rus', seven in Estonia, five in Lithuania, twenty-two in Latvia, thirty (!) in the lands of the Baltic Slavs—the Wends—and in Sweden… just one. There are even more of these blades in Estonia than in the land
of the 'fearsome Vikings'! And the number of Frankish 'signature' swords found in Wendish lands clearly shows that, in the eyes of the Frankish merchants, the profits from trade with the Slavs far outweighed any troubles their most Christian sovereigns might have caused them.

However, Arab authors report that the Rus' themselves produced swords in that very mysterious Artania (also known as Arsania or Urtab). But this is precisely the observation that Normanists do not particularly favour. For two blades bearing the Slavic names of their makers have already been found. The first of these swords caused a most remarkable mix-up. For a long time, it was paraded as a prime example of a 'typically Scandinavian' blade; they quoted the skalds – 'a bloodied serpent lies upon the blade, whilst another wraps its tail around the hilt' – proudly pointing to the serpentine monsters depicted on the hilt. I do not even know whether anyone pointed out to them in response that the snakes were copied from Scandinavian… *gravestones* and make it crystal clear that the blacksmith who depicted them on *the weapon* was clearly unfamiliar with Scandinavian culture. But then scientists learnt how to remove centuries-old rust from the blades, and letters appeared on the blade of a 'typical Scandinavian sword', reading… Ludota the blacksmith.

What do you think, reader, did this fiasco teach the Normanists anything at all? You're quite right – absolutely nothing. The confident labelling of the notorious 'thunder axes' – christened, for reasons unknown, 'Thor's hammers' – as 'typically Scandinavian artefacts' continues; as the Normanists themselves note, these are typologically closest not to finds from the Swedish coast, but to those from the Slavic Rügen; the laede-style rivets found in the Gnezdovo burials, which, as archaeologists have noted, 'are closer to Baltic and Slavic traditions than to the Scandinavian one'; and the oval fibulae,

which, even in the Swedish town of Birke, are found in the same grave as Slavic pottery and a typically Slavic embroidered tunic, yet near Rostov, for some reason, are regarded as compelling evidence of the woman's Norman origin. Moreover, and this is telling, when these fibulae are found in the burial mounds of the Livonians or Veps, they do not indicate a Scandinavian origin – only in the burial grounds of Russian towns. There's that 'objectivity' again! A woman from a Finnish tribe is, so to speak, permitted to be buried with this piece of jewellery, but the moment it turns up in the grave of a Russian boyarina, she is immediately transformed into a Swede.

Just don't, dear reader, call these people Russophobes. They take great, *great* offence when they are called Russophobes. They call their approach 'objective'. And indeed, one must be the most perfect 'object'… but never mind, never mind; silence, as the classic used to say.

The second sword bearing a Slavic mark is somewhat older than the creation of the blacksmith Lyudota. The former was made during the reign of either Svyatoslav or his sons, whilst the latter was forged in the mid-tenth century, under Prince Igor Rurikovich, during the second generation of the Varangian-Rus' people living in Eastern Europe. At this very time, according to the Normannists, the Rus' spoke their Norman language to the full, and bore exclusively Scandinavian names. Now, on this sword—which, unlike Lyudot's, was found not even in the Slavic region of Kyiv, but in the non-Slavic Middle Volga region (precisely on the 'Fur Route'), in the Balymer burial ground—the name 'Slavimir' is inscribed.

Any comments? And what, dear reader, could possibly be said here?

As for Viking-era swords bearing the mark of a Scandinavian blacksmith, they are still being sought.

I shall add one final remark regarding swords: Ibn Khordadbeh is not the only one to report that swords were one of the Rus' major exports to Arab countries. If you, dear reader, have not picked up on this, let me repeat: to Arab countries. To the homeland of the renowned Damascus steel. And there they were snapped up with great enthusiasm. At the same time, the Arabs were, shall we say, more than a little reserved in their praise of Byzantine blades. In general, the Arabs of that era, when comparing Eastern Rome and Rus' – which, incidentally, they regarded *as a state* rather than some sort of 'confederation of tribes' – were somehow very… biased,

. Unlike our modern authors, who habitually view their ancestors' relations with Byzantium through a Byzantine lens. Byzantine authors say nothing about the victories of Igor or Sviatoslav – which means they never happened (never mind that, according to the Byzantines Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes, Sviatoslav's victorious Byzantine army was being driven straight… towards its own capital). It is said that Rus' was ruled not by sovereigns but by 'leaders'—archons—so that must have been the case (never mind that Byzantine authors refer to the Bulgarian tsar and the Egyptian emir in exactly the same way—as 'leaders'… or that all other peoples called the rulers of Rus' 'kings', 'tsars', or even 'khakans'—emperors). For example, Ibn Rusta writes that the Rus' 'numerous cities', whilst Ibn Khordadbeh notes that in Byzantium there were only five proper cities, the rest being walled villages. Well, what is this, if not blatant bias! Our historians know far better than some of those so-called contemporaries – it was the Rus' who had walled villages, whilst the Romans, yes, they had proper cities!

And Ibn Khordadbeh even goes so far as to claim that Rus' merchants travelled as far as China with their goods. It's a pity, really, that he died not ten years, but over ten centuries ago; otherwise, our champions of 'objectivity' would have been quick to label him a 'fanatical nationalist' and award him an 'inferiority complex'. Western authors, on the other hand, confidently send them off to the Central Asian steppes… yes, dear reader, those very same Vikings. As we mentioned in the introduction, representatives of Western civilisation revere their ancestors (even if the ancestor is an unkempt thug with an axe) and are only too happy to attribute achievements to them at others' expense, in which our 'objective' authors serve as faithful and reliable accomplices.

Strictly speaking, the very portrayal of the Rus' as merchants would pull the rug out from under the feet of the Normanists – if indeed there ever was one to begin with. For not a single source depicts the Scandinavians outside Eastern Europe as merchants. That is to say, merchants are mentioned in the sagas, but they are few in number; this is not their main occupation, and they do not command great respect from those around them. With one very telling exception – a few merchants with names so indistinctly similar (Ali, Oli, Gilli) that it gives the impression as though the Norman storyteller is simply trying to

indicate that they were foreigners. Each of these merchants bears the characteristic nickname ‘the Rich’, and the significant addition – ‘of Gard’. From Rus’, it would seem. As for the rest – for an ordinary Norman, it is far more honourable and even, in a way, more natural *to take* something than to buy it. As for selling anything – that is out of the question.

‘Merchant’ in the sagas is a derogatory nickname, unflattering to a Scandinavian.

It is curious that even the largest trading centres of the Baltic region are either mentioned only very briefly in the Norse sagas (Hedeby, Volyn-Jomsburg, Gotland), or not at all (the Swedish (!) Birka, the Åland Islands, and the trading centres of the Obodrites and the Velets). One gets the impression that the Normans these places seemed not worth mentioning, or perhaps it was not the Normans who traded there at all. More likely, it was both.

The result of such differing attitudes towards trade is clear. The city of the Baltic Slavs at the mouth of the Oder, Volyn, which Western authors describe *as the largest city in Europe* (our historians, of course, do not shy away from such bias and ‘quote’:

‘the largest city of the Baltic Slavs’), covered an area of fifty hectares in the 9th century, and its population numbered between five and ten thousand people. Sweden’s largest trading centre, Birka (which, for some reason, is not mentioned in the Scandinavian sagas and where, for some reason, Slavic pottery predominates), covered only twelve hectares at the same time. The largest Danish trading centre, Hedeby (which became so after the Danish king Gotrik, at the beginning of the 9th century, razed the capital city of the Slavic Obodrites, Rerik, and, under escort, resettled the merchants and craftsmen from there to Hedeby) covered twenty-four hectares at the height of its prosperity, whilst its population did not even reach a thousand. Moreover, to put it mildly, its inhabitants did not live in abundance – the Spanish Arab Ibrahim al-Tartushi, who visited Hedeby in the mid-10th century, during that very ‘heyday’, described with horror the appalling stench of cattle carcasses lying by the gates, the filth of the streets, and people forced by starvation to drown… their own newborn children.

In Volhynia, as in other towns of the Slavic Baltic region, according to the accounts of German missionary monks – who had little else to praise in the stubborn pagan Slavs – in every courtyard, in a separate room, stood a table laid out and open to anyone who wished to eat, laden with delicacies; chests

were left unlocked out of the utmost honesty; magnificent churches stood everywhere; the inhabitants' clothing was rich and neat; and as for beggars, they seemed to have no concept of such a thing.

However, as soon as those very same monks travelled on business to Denmark, to visit their kinsmen and fellow believers, the vivid colours rapidly faded from their account, which began to resemble a dreary picture painted by Tartushi: everywhere there was squalor and poverty; the inhabitants' livelihoods consisted more of hunting, fishing and livestock farming rather than agriculture or trade; the churches and houses of the nobility are poor and sparsely decorated; there is neither luxury nor refinement in their way of life. It seems the venerable fathers had become rather spoilt in the Slavic towns!

Archaeology tells the same story – Arab coins on the shores of the Baltic first (in the 8th century) appeared in the Slavic Pomor region, at the start of the following century on Gotland, and only then, in the mid-9th century, did they appear in Sweden. Moreover, five thousand dirham coins were found there. Is that a lot? Well, reader, it depends on how you look at it. The Arab traveller Ibn Fadlan reports that Rus' merchants make their wives a string of beads from every… ten thousand dirhams of capital. And the Arab adds that he saw women with many rows of such beads on their chests. Even if ALL the Swedish hoards were combined, there would not be enough dirhams to make up half such a necklace. There are no apparent borrowings from the Norse language in the commercial sphere in the Slavic dialects. Indeed, there are not all that many of these borrowings in the Old Russian language to begin with. Normanists sometimes point out that I.I. Sreznevsky, a prominent 19th-century linguist, counted ten such loanwords (even though the Danes, who ruled *part* of England *for thirty years*, bequeathed *ten per cent of the roots* to the English language). However, following Sreznevsky, at the beginning of the 20th century, the prominent Normanists S.N. Syromyatnikov and V.A. Moshyn reduced the list first to eight, and then to six words. In contrast, the Scandinavian languages contain more than twelve words borrowed from the Slavs. And the majority are related to trade. These include 'lodhia' – a boat, a vessel (surprising as it may seem, it was not the famous Norman seafarers who gave the Slavs the name for a ship, but the other way round!); 'torg' – trade itself, which speaks volumes about the role of Slavic merchants in Scandinavia; 'besman' – a 'bezmen', an item essential to trade; 'silki' – 'silk', one

Among the most valuable Eastern goods were ‘sapul’ – a saddle – and ‘tolk’ – an interpreter, known in Old Russian as ‘tolkovin’. It is telling that the Scandinavians borrowed the Slavic word for ‘interpreter’, whilst the Slavs themselves were unfamiliar with the Norse terms for an interpreter. ‘Pitshaft’ – a seal – was also a useful item in commercial transactions. Igor’s treaty with the Greeks in 944 mentions a silver seal possessed by the Rus’ ‘guests’ in Constantinople, in contrast to the prince’s men, who used a gold one. Moreover, the written will which, according to the same treaty, was drawn up by the Rus’, may also have required a seal for authentication. And that is not all—far from it.

Furthermore, the esteemed customs official reports that the Rus’ travelled as far as Baghdad on camels. Here again, the Normanists cannot wriggle out of it: the fact is that the Scandinavian name for the camel is of *Latin*, literary origin – which, of course, would not have been the case had the Scandinavians had direct contact with the Arabs and their ‘ships of the desert’. By contrast, the Slavic ‘velblud’ is a clear reinterpretation of the Arabic name for the animal, a sort of play on meaning and sound entirely in the spirit of Leskov’s ‘melkoskop’ or Shchedrin’s ‘delikaty’. Academician Rybakov, with typical Soviet restraint, suggested that the name should be interpreted as ‘one that walks a great deal’, whereas I, for my part, believe that the Arabic name for the pack animal, ‘yebilun’, steered the thoughts of Russian merchants in a slightly different direction, evoking mischievous associations, and that the root ‘blud’ in the animal’s name should be understood somewhat differently. Incidentally, further evidence of the Slavs’ direct connection with the East – and the absence of such a connection amongst the Scandinavians – is also linked, in a way, to an animal, though not a real one, but… a chess piece. I am, of course, talking about the bishop. The fact is that throughout Western Europe, including Scandinavia, chess became known via Arab intermediaries. Islam, however, did not favour pieces depicting living creatures, so some of them underwent significant alterations and were reinterpreted in Europe. The unknown and unseen elephant fell victim to these changes – it was replaced by
the ‘bishop’. It was precisely the ‘bishops’ that stood between the royal pair and the ‘knights’ – the horsemen – in the Norse chess set discovered in 1851 on the Norwegian island of Lewis. It is the mitres of Catholic archbishops that the pointed ‘heads’ of our chess ‘bishops’ resemble. Yet their name dates back to much earlier

times – in Rus', a 'elephant' piece, depicting an actual elephant, was found in layers dating from the 9th century – the century of the trading expeditions of Russian merchants described by Ibn Khordadbeh – if they could travel as far as China, they could surely have reached India as well. And if this name has become established in the Russian language, it means that such journeys by the distant forerunners of Afanasy Nikitin were neither small in number nor rare[25] .

The Old Testament's Balaam, they say, could not see the angel standing before him, and his own donkey had to turn to the slow-witted prophet so that he might finally see the light. But even the testimony of elephants and camels, I fear, will not help the Normanist 'Balaams' to perceive the obvious truth.

The Russian language contains a wealth of words of Eastern origin, some of which predate the Golden Horde's conquest by a considerable margin. Kaftan, sharovary, sarafan, even shuba – all these are names for garments of Eastern origin. They simply do not exist in the Scandinavian languages – yet those very sharovary were one of the most distinctive items of clothing worn by the Rus', as depicted by the Arabs. Contrary to the reconstructions of modern artists obsessed with Normanism, the Scandinavians, judging by numerous depictions and burials, never wore wide trousers, but rather narrow, close-fitting ones.

On the other hand, Arab writers give no reason to believe that they had any close – or indeed any – acquaintance with the Scandinavians. Thus, the capital of the Rus', the 'mother of Russian cities' in our chronicles, the 'city of the Rus'' mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, and the first and closest of the 'parts of the Rus' to the lands of Islam – Kyiv – is known to Arab authors (as, indeed, to all those listed) by its Slavic name. The existence of a Norse name for Kyiv – 'Kenugard' – remains unknown to them. The Baltic Sea, familiar to the Scandinavians, is referred to by the Arabs as the 'Sea of the Varangians' – that is, they literally render the Russian 'Varyazhskoye More'. The Scandinavian term Eyestrasalt – 'eastern salt' – is not mentioned by a single Eastern author. And yet, if one is to believe the Normanists, the Arabs had been in contact with the mythical Swedish Rus' from the beginning of the 9th century. And they retained no memory of it – just like all other peoples on earth, starting with the Swedes themselves.

Ibn Khordadbeh's account that the Rus' employed Slavs as interpreters finds a perfect parallel in the account

our chronicles, which state that Prince Oleg's Rus' employed the services of interpreters—'tolkovins'—from the Slavic people known as the Tiverians whilst in Constantinople. This, incidentally, also corresponds with the words of the same chronicle, which
'the Slavic language and the Rus' language are one and the same', and with the account by the Spanish Jew Ibrahim ibn Ya'qub that the Rus' speak Slavic, and with the assertion by Pope John XIII in a bull dated 967 that Rus' priests conduct services in the Slavic language. Normanists prefer to turn a blind eye to all these accounts, contriving
a 'light and effortless' [26]Scandinavian interpretation from the 'Rus' names of the rapids in the work of Constantine the Purple-Born.

However, enough about the Scandinavians for now. One need only glance at any map of their voyages – specifically the western section, which reflects the actual voyages of the Vikings rather than the wild fantasies of domestic and foreign Normanists – to discover that the Scandinavians preferred the seashore and practically never travelled up rivers beyond the middle reaches. And they only ventured that far if there was plunder on a scale comparable to Paris, Lyon or London to be found in that middle course. Moreover, there were no rapids on the Thames, the Loire or the Seine – whereas in Eastern Europe, rapids greeted the Normans, accustomed to the vastness of the ocean, if you'll pardon the pun, right at the doorstep: as early as the 14th century, the rapids of the Neva forced foreign merchants to unload their goods onto carts and travel overland to Ladoga. If Norman scholars are able to devise a reason why the Normans, contrary to their usual practice, nevertheless made their way deep into the forests and marshes of Eastern Europe, traversing all the rapids and portages, whilst managing to leave no record of this either among themselves or among those to whom they sailed, then all that remains for us, dear reader, is to marvel at the flight of their imagination.

In reality, however, the Normans did not begin to penetrate Eastern Europe until the mid-10th century at the earliest, and their incursions into the Russian lands only became truly intensive from the end of that century, after the warriors of Yumna—a fortress on an island opposite Volhynia, whom the Scandinavians called the Jomsvikings— a military brotherhood of the Order-type that maintained order in the eastern Baltic Sea and, according to the skalds, consisted mainly of Wends, had almost entirely perished in Norway. It is no wonder that the sagas make no mention of Russian princes prior to Vladimir

the Baptist, nor of Byzantine emperors prior to John Tzimiskes (and certainly not, as rumour has it).

Let us move on to the final point in Ibn Khordadbeh's account – the Rus' present themselves as Christians, and as such pay the jizya. As we have already discussed, dear reader, the jizya was a condition of the Caliphate's compromise with the infidels, under which the rulers of the faithful agreed to tolerate the presence of 'kafirs' within their borders. Moreover, this applied only to the 'People of the Book' – Jews, Christians and Sabians; Zoroastrians, on the other hand, aroused the greatest suspicion. A pagan was to be compelled to convert to Islam – or perish; he was given no other choice; exceptions were made only for pagans of great importance to the Caliphate, such as the warriors Nebula and Solnoslav, but even then, one might suppose, not for long. The professionally sceptical customs officer evidently regarded the Christianity of these northern foreigners as a cunning ploy to make their lives easier in the realm of the Prophet's sons – may Allah bless him and grant him peace!

But in reality – could the Rus' who passed through Ibn Khordadbeh's customs post at Rey have been Christians, and if so, what sort exactly?

This is not the earliest mention of baptised Rus' people prior to 988. There is also mention of Bravlin, a Rus' prince from 'Novgorod' (Neapolis Scythica? Novgorod-Seversky? One of the numerous Nogrods and Novigrads along the Danube? In any case, it seems that Novgorod on the Volkhov did not yet exist at that time) in the 8th century. This prince, with his retinue, waged war throughout the 'Korsun region' – that is, the environs of Chersonesos Taurica – as far as Korchev, present-day Kerch. Judging by this name, derived from the Old Russian word 'korchiy' (blacksmith), there were already quite a few Slavs living in the lands bordering the Azov Sea – possibly refugees from the 'swift raid' of Mervan the Merciless and the civil war in Khazaria. In Surozh (modern-day Sudak; the Rus' people named the Sea of Azov the 'Surozh Sea' after this town), which was captured after a ten-day battle, Bravlin burst into the Church of Saint Sophia, where the relics of Saint Stephen of Surozh lay, and there he was struck down by a sudden fit. In a state of terror, the prince ordered all the captives to be released and the spoils taken from the churches to be returned: this, he claimed, was what Saint Stephen, who had appeared to him, had commanded. After carrying out these orders, Bravlin was baptised and healed. Later, whilst Ibn Khordadbeh was still alive, in that

same Korsun-Chersonesos, Cyril-Constantine—sent by the Caesar as an ambassador to the Khazar khagan—would see a Gospel and a Psalter written
'in Rus' script'. Apparently, some sort of Christian community of Rus' people existed in Crimea. But Rus' Christianity may well have had its roots in far more ancient times…

However, we must first resolve the question of Ibn Khordadbeh's merchants. We have already considered whether they might have been Christians. Most likely, yes, they could have been. Whether they actually were is another matter, but it seems to me that the answer is not difficult to arrive at. After all, in order to convincingly pass themselves off as Christians before the vigilant tax authorities of the 'Commander of the Faithful'—who were perfectly familiar with both the Catholic Orthodox of Byzantium (I would remind you that there were still two centuries to go before the churches split into the Western, Roman Catholic, and Eastern, Greek Catholic or Orthodox branches), as well as with the Nestorians of Syria and the Monophysites of Armenia, one would have had to be at the very least well-versed in Christianity. And since there was not a single Christian power along the Volga-Baltic route, and the first envoys of the 'people of Rus' were only just reaching Orthodox Constantinople at that time, there is only one conclusion to be drawn: there were already Christians amongst the Rus'. And quite rightly, it is easier to imagine them among the merchants, who had more contact with other peoples and were, by necessity, more open to foreign customs, traditions and gods. As for Ibn Khordadbeh's doubts, these can be attributed solely to the scepticism inherent in his profession.

In general, historians pay little attention to one most intriguing question. Namely: the accounts of the Rus' baptism relate precisely to that period (the 9th–11th centuries) when the Rus' in the sources 'differ markedly' from the Slavs. Moreover, judging by the fact that as early as the beginning of the 12th century the Novgorod Slovenes are mentioned as a people outside the Christian world, whilst the Krivichians, Vyatichians and Radimichians are classified as 'pagans', and pagan shrines were still in use in the lands of the Volhynians prior to the Mongol invasion, it follows that what took place in 988 was not so much the baptism of the Rus' state as the baptism of the Rus' people. The Varangians were also Christians in Eastern Europe – 'for many of the Varangians were Christians' in 944; the Varangian martyrs in Kyiv, Theodore and his son John, in 983; the Varangians Afrikan and his son Shimon-Rurik,
the 'patrons' and benefactors of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra. And yet
'for some reason' there is not a trace of Scandinavian influence in Varangian-Russian Christianity.

And their Christianity did not prevent the Varangian Rus' from assimilating into the Slavic pagan population – V.Y. Petrukhin, one of the most active contemporary Normanists, claims that baptism actually… facilitated this assimilation!

Such are these enigmatic people with their peculiar logic.

However, whilst the mythical Norman Rus' left no traces in Russian Christianity, some Western influences did remain. Indeed, 'some' is an understatement! Old Russian words
'krest' (cross), 'tserky' (church), 'altar', 'pop' (priest), 'eretik' (heretic) and 'pogany' (pagan) clearly resemble the Germanic-Romance 'Kreuz' (from 'Christus'),
'kirkhe' (from 'circus'), 'altar' (from 'papa'), 'hereticus',
'paganus'. And they bear no resemblance whatsoever to their Greek equivalents – stauros, naos, bomos, hieros, heterodoxos, ethnikos. What is more, the very people from whom our ancestors supposedly adopted the Christian faith were not referred to by the name by which the Byzantines called themselves – 'Romai', 'Romans' – whilst claiming descent from the rulers of half the world. Russian chronicles refer to them as 'Greeks' – a Latin epithet that was just as offensive to the subjects of Eastern Rome as the word 'Yid' is to an Israeli citizen, or 'churka' or 'khachik' to a native of the Caucasus. The customs of church singing and bell-ringing, which have become so closely associated with Russian Orthodoxy, and much else besides, are of Western, rather than Byzantine, origin.

There is another curious feature of early Russian Christianity to which far too little attention is paid. Even in the account of the baptism of Rus', the chronicler puts into the mouth of a Byzantine preacher – a 'philosopher from among the Greeks' – words that an Orthodox Byzantine would have uttered only under threat of death – and even then, hardly at all. This refers to the 'seniority' of God the Father in the Creed and the 'consubstantiality' of God the Son with him. Furthermore, the mention of the 'non-hypostatic nature' of the three Persons of the Trinity – which is almost obligatory in any reasonably detailed exposition of the Creed – is completely absent. All these are characteristics of the ancient heresy of Arius, Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt. The main difference between this heresy and Orthodoxy lay precisely in the assertion of Christ's 'consubstantiality' rather than 'consubstantiality' with his heavenly Father; indeed, in the Greek text, these words were separated by literally a single iota – 'omoiousios' and 'homousios' respectively. Yet behind that single iota lay such a difference in views of the world and God that people would

hesitated to sacrifice their own lives for – let alone those of others. At the height of its power, Arianism had subjugated half of the dying Roman Empire; it was professed by the mighty barbarian peoples of the Vandals and the Goths. With great difficulty, the Church managed to overcome this heresy – but not to destroy it. In Kievan Rus', in the very first centuries following its baptism, Basil the Great's critique of one of Arianism's ideologues, Eunomius, and the 'Sermons' specifically composed against the Arians by their chief opponent, Athanasius, were translated. What is more, Russian Orthodox thinkers were already beginning to write actively in an anti-Arian vein – Theodosius of the Caves, Cyril of Turov! Why fight so fiercely against a phantom?! If Arianism was being combated, with the involvement of the finest minds, both local and foreign, then it must have been very much alive!

So where did Arianism come from in Rus'? It would seem that neither the Goths nor the Vandals – let alone those from Alexandria in Egypt – played an active part in the fortunes of the young Rurikid state?

Here we must go back to the days of the Danube state of the Rugians and Rus'. The Life of Saint Severin, one of the most comprehensive sources on this people (which in fact speaks not of its wealth of information, but of how little we know about the Rugians), specifically mentions the Arian faith held by many noblemen in this Danube realm. Following the fall of the Rugians-Rus' kingdom under the onslaught of the Goths and the rise of the Avars, many clans who practised this religion may have left the inhospitable banks of the Danube and returned to their ancestral homeland in the southern Baltic region. Judging by the appearance – or, more precisely, the manifestation – of the Arians in Kievan Rus' and, distinctly, in the European lexicon of early Russian Christianity, they managed throughout this period not to incur the wrath of the powerful priests of Rügen. They may also have brought to Eastern Europe and 'rooted in the local landscape' the Danube legend of the Apostle Andrew's wanderings through those lands where, much later, Rugaland-Rusaramarca, Danube Rus', would arise, and where lovers of hot baths, the Slovenes, and the Danube Obodrites-Varangians would settle near their Nograd. Both the Kyiv prince Askold and the Rus' merchants mentioned by Ibn Khordadbeh may have belonged to one such family.

This explains the unusual nature of their Christianity, which aroused the suspicion of a cautious customs official. Indeed, these Christians

were neither Armenian Monophysites, who denied the human nature of Christ, nor Nestorians from Syria, who, on the contrary, regarded the Saviour of Nazareth as merely the best of men, nor Orthodox Catholics from the Second Rome on the Bosphorus. The name they gave to the chief Christian shrine bore no resemblance to the Greek ‘stavros’ or the Armenian ‘khach’ (the Nestorians did not venerate the cross at all; four centuries later, a Nestorian Mongol khan would shock Marco Polo by telling him that he considered the veneration of the instrument of the righteous man’s execution to be blasphemy). And yet they were Christians – Russian Christians of the Arian faith.

Returning to the mythical Swedish Rus’ – in the ninth century, according to the hagiography of Saint Ansgar, who preached in the lands of Sweden, his flock consisted entirely of slaves from Christian Europe. As for the Swedes themselves, even two and a half centuries later they refused to recognise as their king a man who refused to offer sacrifices to Thor (this man, incidentally, had been baptised in Rus’ itself). Later, the newly elected king, a former Christian, refused—despite the entreaties of the clergy—to demolish the vast pagan temple in Uppsala or even to put a stop to the bloody sacrifices taking place there, citing the inevitable uproar among his subjects, which might cost him not only his crown, and the venerable fathers – their very lives.

The Rus’ also remained largely pagan (in Oleg the Prophet’s treaty with the Byzantine emperors Leo and Alexander, the phrase ‘Rus’ or Christian’ is used – one or the other!), but sources do at least mention Christians amongst them. Christians, for their part, may have been concentrated in merchant circles – for their faith served them well in both Christian and, as we can see, Muslim countries.

Ibn Khordadbeh could hardly have imagined that, some half a century after he wrote his *Book of Roads and Kingdoms* in the intervals between his arduous duties as a customs officer, soldiers would follow the paths trodden by merchants.

Incidentally, some researchers note that the first raids by the ferocious ‘Russ’ on the Eastern Roman Empire and its capital – Constantinople (Tsargrad) – coincide remarkably with the intensification of the Byzantine–Arab wars. Some have even suggested

that the Rus' entered into an alliance with the Caliphate. I shall not go that far, but will merely suggest, for my part, that the Rus' merchants, just as Muslim merchants once did for Genghis Khan's hordes, carried out, in addition to their usual trading activities, intelligence missions on behalf of their sovereigns. And although the pagan Rus' were most likely not intending to befriend the Muslims, it was very useful to know when two enemies would clash with one another – and to take advantage of the situation.

Around the time of Ibn Khordadbeh, an Arab governor was killed whilst fighting the rebellious Armenians. The Caliph dispatched a massive punitive army to the Transcaucasus, led by the commander Buga the Elder. Buga was not content with yet another – and, alas, far from the last – rout of the Armenians. The Muslim punitive forces pressed further north. Tiflis was captured, its ruler Saak (strikingly, an Armenian name rather than a Georgian one) was killed, and the valley and mountain villages of Georgia were laid waste. Buga routed the army of the Abkhazian king Theodosius and advanced to the Darial Gorge, in the vicinity of which the Cenarians (Sanarians) lived. The Sanarians put up a valiant resistance against the invader, but the forces were too unequal. And then, as al-Ya'qubi, who recounts this, relates, the defenders of the Darial Gorge appealed for help to three rulers, enemies of the Arabs: 'Sahib al-Rum' (the ruler of the Romans, the Byzantine Emperor); 'Sahib al-Khazar' (the khagan of Khazaria) and 'Sahib al-Sakaliba' – the ruler of the Slavs. Scholars have debated at length the identity of this 'ruler of the Slavs', suggesting the Volga Bulgars – but they were too far away – and the Danube Bulgars – equally distant and not bordering the Muslim world at that time. The most likely explanation is that the reference was to a prince of the Rus', though it is unknown which branch of the Rus' he represented – whether the northern Rus', the Kyiv Rus' or, as seems most likely to me, the Crimean Rus'. To my deepest regret, dear reader, I have also been unable to find any mention of how the pleas for help from the unfortunate Sanarians were received. The Khazars, in any case, offered them no assistance; Byzantium, too, was slow to come to their aid – or perhaps simply did not manage to do so in time. Nor is anything known about the presence of the Rus' in the Caucasus at that time, so that the Sanarians' envoys, even if they reached their destination, were too late to bring aid to their unfortunate compatriots. Only Alania halted the Arab invaders on that occasion, and

not with its own army, but with the cold of the approaching winter, which struck fear into the hearts of those native to the hot lands of the south.

In 909, the Rus' on sixteen ships – according to various sources, Rus' ships could carry between forty and a hundred men – attacked the island of Abeskun in the Astrabad Gulf, after which the Caspian Sea itself was sometimes called the Abeskun Sea. The island was plundered. A year later, the town of Sari in Mazandaran, Iran – which, incidentally, was by no means situated directly on the seashore – was burnt to the ground. The inhabitants were taken into slavery. The local residents, enraged, attacked a Rus' caravan spending the night by the shore – whether these were the same people or others, they did not know and, one must suppose, did not wish to know. Those who had spent the night on the shore were slaughtered, whilst the boats that had fled out to sea were intercepted and destroyed by the fleet of the ruler of the Transcaucasian state of Shirvan, the Shirvanshah Ali ibn al-Gaitam.

It was a grave mistake – whether culpable or not, in those days Russian blood was never left unavenged. Centuries and centuries remained before the time when an Islamic authority, who had called on television screens to 'slaughter the Russian dogs', would be posthumously awarded the title of 'Hero of Russia'. In those days, the Rus' were guided by somewhat different principles, which, to be frank, appeal to me, the reader, far more.

Ibn Rusta: 'And if any of their tribes is wronged, they all rise up. And there is no discord amongst them then, but they march against the enemy until they are victorious… and if they attack another people, they do not hold back until they have utterly destroyed them.'

An anonymous author of the *Collection of Stories* from 1126, which naturally dates back to much earlier times: 'And a custom has remained whereby, if anyone sheds the blood of a Rus', they will not rest until they have taken their revenge. And even if you were to give them the whole world, they would still not waver from this.'

Chapter 2 The Unfortunate Year

Al-Masudi – the 10th-century Sinbad. The avengers and Kagan-bek Aaron. A storm from the north over the shores of the Caspian Sea. Revenge is exacted. The treachery of Kagan-bek. The Massacre at Itil. Who were they? Igor's Feat. The Cambridge 'Fake'. The Tumutorokan 'Sich'.

Oh, how far the falcon soars,
striking birds – towards the
sea!
And Igor's valiant host shall not be stopped!
Karna cried out after him,
And Zhlya galloped across the Russian lands.

'The Tale of Igor's Campaign'

Al-Masudi tells us of this campaign by the avengers, which ended in one of the most terrible and bloody defeats suffered by the Rus' on their eastern expeditions. We have come across this name several times already; it is now time to get to know its bearer in greater detail.

Al-Masudi was born in Baghdad—a city that seems like a fairy tale to us—the largest city of the Caliphate. The son of a noble family tracing its lineage back to Masud himself, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, he received an excellent education for his time, but his youthful curiosity was insatiable. He travelled throughout all the Muslim lands, visiting the Emirate of Córdoba, Egypt—where he recorded eerie tales of the ghosts of the pyramids—Persia, Armenia (which had been conquered by the Muslims), the distant wonderland of India, and even, according to some accounts, China. Having completed these journeys, worthy of Sinbad, he described them in twenty books, recounting in detail everything he had seen and adding what he had merely heard – though, in such cases, the honest Arab invariably qualified his account by adding, in accordance with the custom of his time,

‘and Allah knows best’. Some of his books themselves comprised twenty to thirty volumes. Alas, I did not use the past tense by chance. Of all this splendour, only… two books have come down to us, one of which is an abridged summary of two other works by al-Masudi (‘The Chronicles’ and ‘The Middle Book’), whilst the other is entitled ‘The Book of Admonition and Revision’ [27] . We are more interested in the summary, to which al-Masudi gave the ornate and elaborate Eastern-style title ‘Gold Pans and Gem Mines’ (in the 19th century it was translated more simply as ‘The Golden Meadows’).

Having described the funeral rites of the Rus’ and compared them with the customs

of ‘Ginda’, that is, India, al-Masudi erred in writing that Indian funeral rites differed from those of the Slavs and Rus in that, among the Hindus, ‘a wife is only cremated with her husband when she herself consents to it’. In reality, the situation was exactly the opposite, and al-Masudi—who had personally visited India and had just written that the women of the Rus’ and the Slavs

‘desire to be burnt’. The same voluntary nature of the Slavic women’s funeral sacrifice is noted by the Frank Boniface, the Byzantine Mauricius, and the Arabs Ibn Rustah and Ibn Fadlan. Moreover, according to all sources, a widow was a highly respected figure in the pagan society of the Rus’ and Slavs; consequently, those who walked into the flames of the funeral pyres had a choice. Moreover, given that many men had several wives and concubines, there was—however hard it may be for us to believe—competition for the ‘position’ of posthumous companion, which, as Ibn Rustah reports, even led to quarrels and fights. At the same time, Indian customs, right up until very recent times, defined a woman who had not fulfilled her ‘sati’ duty as a ritually impure being, a living dead person, and condemned her to live out her pitiful life in seclusion and silence. Another of al-Masudi’s errors is also noteworthy – he claims that in the lands of the Rus there is a silver mine on the scale of the Khwarezmian silver mines; in reality, however, the main, if not the sole, source of silver for the Rus was,

in all likelihood, trade with the East[28] . He goes on to report that the Rus’ comprise many peoples, the most numerous of whom are the so-called Ludana. For more than a century, this account has posed an insurmountable enigma for historians, each of whom interprets the mysterious ‘Ludana’ according to their own preferences – the Normans (as if they could be left out),

the Ladogans, the Lyutichs, or the Ulichs. The Rus', says al-Masudi, travel with their goods to Spain—Andalusia, Rum (since Byzantium, usually referred to as Rum-Rome, will be mentioned below, we can only interpret al-Masudi's 'Rum' as the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation), Constantinia (Constantinople, that is, Byzantium) and Khazaria.

Having introduced the Rus' people to the readers in this introduction, al-Masudi continues his narrative.

In 912 (Al-Masudi himself, of course, dates the campaign to the three-hundredth year of the Hijra), a Rus' army on five hundred ships, each of which carried one hundred warriors (I think it goes without saying that these figures are, shall we say, approximate), entered, it would appear (al-Masudi's account is rather unclear at this point), the Sea of Azov and asked the Khazar khagan-bek for permission to pass through the lands of the khaganate to the Caspian Sea. In exchange, they offered, naturally, a share of the spoils – no less than half. I do not know what considerations guided these Rus' – relations between Rus' and Khazaria were, to put it mildly, strained at that time. After Oleg had freed the Slavic lands of the Vyatichi, Radimichi and Severians from the heavy Khazar tribute, Khazaria even imposed a blockade on the Rus' trade caravans. Naturally, neither the Rus' nor the Muslim merchants were disheartened by this for long, and trade was soon resumed, bypassing the Khaganate via the state of the Volga Bulgars. The Khazars found themselves bypassed in every sense, and one would have had to be completely oblivious to the vengeful nature of Asians in general—and of the Rahdonid clan ruling Khazaria in particular—to think that they would forgive such an act—or even forget it. But the defeats inflicted by the weapons of Oleg the Prophet's warriors were, one must suppose, still fresh in the Khazars' memory – the khagan-bek did not dare to refuse and thereby invite a direct confrontation. The Rus' evidently sailed up the Don, crossed over to the Volga (or perhaps sailed down the Volga?) and, passing through Itil, the new capital of Khazaria, made their way to the Caspian Sea. The vast, frozen city, in the silence of deep hatred, watched the boats of the fearsome 'people of Ros' sail southwards, their animal-like muzzles protruding from the bows, sun crosses with broken ends on their sails and shields, and their sides covered in scales. And the numerous Slavic male and female slaves watched the departing boats with bitterness.

The Swiss historian Adam Metz, in his book *The Muslim Renaissance*: ‘The main commodity supplied by Europe – slaves – was a monopoly of Jewish trade.’ The renowned Czech scholar Lubor Niederle, in his book *Slavic Antiquities*, writes: ‘The entire trade in Slavic slaves was in the hands of the Jews.’ ‘The slave trade, through which Slavic slaves found their way into the Arab world, was conducted predominantly by Jewish merchants known as the Rahdonites’ – and this is our contemporary, D.E. Mishin, author of the remarkable book *The Sakaliba (Slavs) in the Islamic World*. I am deliberately quoting these passages verbatim so as not to be accused of biased fabrications. The scale of this trade is illustrated by the census data from Córdoba, the capital of Arab Spain – a country not exactly close to the Khazar Khaganate – cited by Mishin himself. In the mid-10th century, there were *thirteen thousand* Slavic slaves in Córdoba. According to the Arab al-Idrisi, they were supplied to the Khazars by bands of Turkic and Magyar raiders, from whom the Khaganate, if we are to believe some of our historians, ‘protected’ the Slavic tribes.

The Rus’ revenge came crashing down upon the shores of the Caspian Sea like a thunderclap from the heavens. ‘Crowds’ of warriors flooded the Jil, the Deylam, the cities of Tabaristan, and the ill-fated Abeskun, and the ‘Oil Country’, as the area around present-day Baku was known – where oil and natural gas gushed forth in great abundance from the ground; the latter, incidentally, was used by the Zoroastrians for their sacred, ever-burning fires, for whom these lands were a favourite place of pilgrimage. The Rus’ warriors even reached Ardabil, in the valley near which the Arab commander Jerrah had once met his end; his army had included ‘Sakaliba’ Slavs – just as the army of the Khazar Barjil, which had routed him, had done. Unexpectedly attacked from the sea – let alone by such a vast army – the local inhabitants were unable to organise any resistance. The forces of Ibn Abis Saja, the Arab governor of Armenia and Azerbaijan, were routed by the invaders, as were the detachments of the Deylimites – the warlike mountain tribes of the southern shores of the Caspian Sea. Blood flowed everywhere; warriors clad in iron, both on foot and mounted warriors[29] , killing, burning and taking captives. The plunder and the captives were transported to the islands off the Azerbaijani coast, as if to provoke their chief adversary, the Shirvanshah. Ali ibn al-Gaitam was imprudent enough to ‘take the bait’ at this enticement. His entire fleet and

several merchant ships, filled with Muslims armed to the teeth, set sail for the islands. Warships of the Rus' came out to meet them. The entire flotilla, together with its ruler, set off to feed the Caspian sturgeons, which had grown immensely fat that year. Thousands of corpses in turbans and striped robes floated on the water, and well-fed seagulls hopped across their swollen backs, searching for tastier spots. The Rus who had perished two years earlier had been avenged a hundredfold, but the avengers lingered for several more months – presumably so as not to lose out by handing over half their spoils to the greedy ruler of Khazaria.

Soon, the boats, weighed down by their spoils and captives, approached Itil. Envoys from the Rus' chieftain set out to hand over the agreed share of the spoils to the khagan-bek. It is curious – did they manage to reach the boats? Or did they, whilst still on their way, catch sight of the steel avalanche flooding the shore – fifteen thousand al-Arsians, the khaganate's finest warriors, clad in iron scale armour from their horse's knees to the slotted visors of their helmets. And Muslims by faith. Riding ahead of them, quite possibly, with a heavy broadsword in his hand, was that very same Ahmad ibn Kuya, whom they are trying to pass off as the son of the founder of Kyiv. And behind them came a throng in striped robes – all the adult Muslim men of the populous trading town of Itil. Among them were Christians too – whether out of a shared hatred for the pagan Rus' or simply in the hope of snatching some of the rich spoils.

And from the red-brick walls of Kemlyk, the palace of the khagans, crowned with Solomon's pentagonal shields, watched the carnage on the riverbank, lovingly stroking his thick, curly black beard and the peyote locks above his ears, smiling with full lips: Khagan-Bek Aaron bar Benjamin, ruler of Khazaria. A man whose faith not only permitted – but indeed imposed upon him – the duty to deceive the pagan akum who had placed his trust in him. All the more so if he belonged to the hated 'people of Ros'. And along with him, the narrow slits of the windows throughout the entire vast city—a city that had grown fat on the sweat of Slavic slaves and the blood of those who refused to be slaves—narrowed with malicious glee.

And in the dark corners, Slavic slave-girls wept quietly, not daring to disturb the malicious jubilation of their 'God-chosen' masters.

Five thousand Rus', according to Masudi, broke free from the bloody trap that the Itil had become for them. Thirty thousand corpses were left lying on the riverbank, and their heads were heaped upon

the town square. Those who had escaped, abandoning their ships, attempted to break out of the khaganate overland…

But already the steppe earth was rumbling beneath the horses' hooves; already, goaded on by the Kagan-Bek, hordes of Burtas nomads—vassals of the Kagan—were racing forward…

Few of those who had set out for the Khvalynsk Sea ever returned to their home.

But where was this home? Hardly in Kyiv. In any

In this instance, several years later, when—incited by the rulers of the Khaganate—'the Pechenegs first arrived on Rus' soil', the Grand Prince of Kyiv, Igor, managed to repel the nomads so effectively that they retreated all the way to the Danube. And a further five years later, a modest line appeared in the chronicles: 'Igor waged war against the Pechenegs', after which the ruler of Kyiv found himself in a position, as we have seen, to 'command' the Pecheneg hordes – who, for their part, did not dare to show themselves near the Rus' borders for almost half a century. To fully appreciate the magnitude of what the ruler of Kyiv achieved, it must be emphasised that, of the European rulers of settled peoples, he was *the first* to succeed in defeating nomads on their own territory, in the steppe. Before him, Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, his descendant Darius, and Zopyrion, a general under Alexander the Great, had all attempted to do so. Darius was the luckiest of them all – not only did he save himself, but he even managed to withdraw part of his army. It is no wonder, then, that he was called 'the Great' – or perhaps it was simply down to the size of his army, which, according to the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, numbered seven hundred thousand warriors. By way of comparison, the great army of Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France, numbered

'only' six hundred thousand. Cyrus was less fortunate – the only tales to reach Persia were of how the leader of a nomadic tribe had stuffed his severed head into a wineskin filled with the blood of his warriors. Zopyrion was the least fortunate of all – his phalanxes vanished into the steppe like a stone into the sea. There were neither rumours nor accounts of the fate of those unfortunate Macedonians. Apparently, having learnt from this experience, the formidable Romans did not even attempt to venture into the steppe. Nor did any of the settled peoples – until Igor Rurikovich, Igor, Son of the Falcon.

The question is: could the Grand Prince of Kyiv have achieved such a feat—freeing two generations of Russian people from their fear of the steppe—had he suffered such a terrible defeat? I do not know about you, reader, but

I have serious doubts about it. I also doubt that Igor's predecessor, a certain Prince Oleg II, son of Oleg the Prophet, met his end on the banks of the Itil, as suggested by S.E. Tsvetkov and V.V. Kozhinov. The forces of Kyiv, whoever led them, did not suffer any losses that year. Otherwise, this would inevitably have affected the situation of Kievan Rus', given the scale of the losses – it would have had a catastrophic impact. Meanwhile, al-Masudi himself reports that the Black Sea (Neitas, in Arabic) is called the 'Russian Sea' (which is also confirmed by our chronicles),
'because, apart from the Rus', 'no one dares to sail upon it'. He refers to the Don as the 'River of the Rus'. Leo the Deacon regards Kerch – the Cimmerian Bosporus – as the base from which Igor launched his attacks on the empire. Is this the people and the state that had just suffered the terrible and senseless loss of tens of thousands of its sons? Could it be that Aaron bar Benjamin missed such a splendid opportunity to bring the hated 'people of Rus' to their knees, or better still – to crush them, to destroy them forever, 'all that is in the city, men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep and donkeys, to put them all to the sword' – in accordance with the commandments of Moses, Joshua, and the meek King David?!

But what about, a well-read reader familiar with books on this period of Russian history might object, what about the Cambridge document, what about the 'Tsar of the Rus', X-l-gv, who was defeated and subjugated by the 'venerable Pesach'?

Let me explain this for the reader who is not so well versed in the subject. In 1912, S. Shechter discovered and immediately published, at the Cambridge Library, a curious source in ancient Hebrew concerning the history of Khazaria in the 10th century. Two sheets of paper (?!) bound together are covered on both sides with large square script. According to one account, this is a version of the correspondence between Kagan-bek Joseph, son of Aaron bar Benjamin, and Hasdai ibn Shaprut. According to another, it is the account of a certain Khazar who escaped death during the Rus' destruction of the Khaganate, recounting the fate of Khazaria to his new master. It is recounted there how 'the villain Romanus', the Emperor of Byzantium, first began persecuting the Jews and then incited the ruler of the Rus', 'H-l-gv', to attack the Khazars. In response,
'the honourable Pesach' went to war against 'H-l-gv', routed him and forced him to fight (?!!) against Byzantium. There, 'H-l-gv' was defeated by 'Greek fire', fled and perished in Persia.

This tale has been attributed to just about everyone – to Igor, to Oleg the Prophet, and to the hypothetical Oleg II. L.N. Gumilev managed to concoct a terrifying fable about Pesach's troops capturing Kyiv – a city not mentioned even once in the document. As for me, I do not feel in any way obliged to attribute it to anyone. I simply set it aside. Why? And you, the reader, what would you do with a text featuring the pagan sorcerer Nikolai Ivanovich? Or the Moscow voivode Karl Eduardovich? Or Catherine the Great's lady-in-waiting, Iskrina Markslenovna?

The first Russian scholar to study the Cambridge document and publish its translation, P.K. Kokovtsev, essentially puts an end to its study by pointing out that the name Pesach appeared among the Jews very late, not before the end of the 13th century. So this 'document' is, at best, an attempt by a medieval – or not quite so medieval – Jewish historian to win, retrospectively – very retrospectively! – a war lost by his ancestors. There are plenty of such examples; the oldest is the inscriptions of Ramses II concerning the battle he 'won' against the Hittites—a people living north of Egypt—at Kadesh, after which the borders between Egypt and the Hittites, for some reason, shifted noticeably… southwards. Subsequently, Hittite inscriptions shed light on the mystery – the pharaoh had suffered a humiliating defeat at the Battle of Kadesh. The same applies here – with the difference that we have long been well acquainted with sources that cast Russian-Khazar relations in the mid-10th century in a more accurate light. And the fact that there are historians attempting to use, say, this forgery to corroborate the Russian chronicles is merely their assessment, nothing more. As for me, I do not consider myself obliged to take the reports of this highly dubious source into account.

At worst, the Cambridge document is yet another 'historical' forgery, cobbled together by a semi-literate Normanist (who had heard that the name Oleg is interpreted as Helgi[30], but having completely forgotten or never known that Oleg the Prophet 'took revenge on the foolish Khazars' long before the accession of the 'villain Romanus'), who is very fond of Jews and very much dislikes Russians[31] . Much like the Russian 'Book of Vles', with the significant difference that the Normanist-Russophobic 'document' has made a triumphant entry into historical scholarship, whilst a single reference to the anti-Norman, Russophile 'Book of Vles' is enough to ruin a historian's reputation.

'Objectivity'? That's it, reader, that's it!

So let us forget this ‘Pesakhov Book’ and repeat once more: in the mid-10th century, under Grand Prince Igor Rurikovich, Rus’ was a powerful state, subordinate to none of its neighbours and bordering the Khaganate along the Don. Let us return to the Rus’ who perished at Itil. So, they were not from Kyiv. Who, then, were they, and where did they come from? It is no coincidence, after all, that al-Masudi began his account of the ill-fated campaign of 912 with the statement that the Rus’
‘consist of various tribes’.

Here it is important to note a circumstance not particularly highlighted by our historians: that in the late 9th–early 10th centuries, according to a whole range of sources, a sort of pirate-merchant free community formed on the Black Sea, similar to the Ukrainian Zaporizhian Sich or the Caribbean buccaneer strongholds of the Age of Discovery – Port-Royal, the Tortugas. Many researchers locate the enigmatic Artania-Arsania-Urtab, the third kingdom of the Rus mentioned in Arabic and Persian sources, precisely here. It was situated in Tmutorokan, and young, adventure-seeking daredevils, loners and ringleaders, warriors who had not settled at any one court, outcasts and fugitives of all kinds flocked there. Later, Tmutorokan became a haven for princes of the most adventurous disposition – take, for instance, Oleg Svyatoslavich-Gorislavich (there is neither offence nor any hint of
‘grief’; it denotes a ‘fiery’ man, a man of brilliant yet fleeting glory, like a flame). It was precisely from here that Rus’ druzhinas may have set out for the north-eastern coast of Byzantium (the Life of Gregory of Amastris, 9th century). And it is highly likely that it was from here that those dashing half-merchants, half-bandits set out on their campaign—the very ones who were slaughtered in 910 by the shipmen of Shirvanshah Ali—and those ill-fated daredevils who avenged them so fiercely, only to lose their own lives along with the fruits of their vengeance.

As for the lesson, it is simple: do not trust the enemy. However advantageous an alliance with you may be to him, your defeat is still more to his advantage. And it would have been better if the Rus’ who marched on the Caspian had begun their revenge with the rout of Itil and the liberation of the Slavic captives.

Chapter 3
The Siege of Berdav

Return to Berdaa. A bit of history and geography. A corner of paradise. 10th-century Rus' warriors. The Rus' manifesto. Arrogance, stupidity, greed and fanaticism – all in one bottle. Five deaths in the garden. A ransom with a seal. A psychological portrait of the natives. The slander of Ibn Miskawayh. Battles, sickness and other grim news. Who and why? The voivode's secret mission. Do not cast your pearls before swine…

Flames – shadows dance
The air reeks of smoke
All that remains of the cities is ash.

Veleslav, 'Cities'

Despite the fact that al-Masudi was convinced himself – and sought to convince his readers – that the Rus' would never dare to repeat the campaign of 912, barely thirty-odd years later the Rus' invasion recurred, albeit on a smaller scale.

We return to Berdaa, dear reader, no longer to the Armenian Partava, but to the Muslim Berdaa. Once, Slavic warriors of the Khazar khagan lay besieged beneath its walls, and now Slavic warriors of a Slavic sovereign have come here. However, the later author Abu al-Faraj asserts that, in addition to Slavs, the retinue that arrived at the walls of Berdaa included Alans and Lezgins[32]; if this were indeed the case, we might assume that the Rus' marched towards Berdaa via the North Caucasus, for otherwise it is entirely unclear where they turned up in this paradise of a land. Some authors suggest that they followed the same route as in 912: the Surozh Sea – the Don – the Volga – the Khvalyn Sea. In that case, a major question arises – what was he doing and how

Was it not Kagan-bek Joseph, son and successor of the treacherous Aaron—the very man who, as I recall, had assured Hasdai ibn Shaprut that he never for a moment left the fearsome Rus alone and would not allow them to enter Muslim lands—who was pondering the situation that had arisen? Much that is good and warm can be said about the Khazars – but it would be hard to call them fools. And if the Rus' did indeed find themselves on the Volga – could they really have refrained from thanking the Khazars, and the Khazar Muslims in particular, for the hospitality shown to their predecessors? Another version – involving a march on foot through Dagestan to Derbent (together with the Alans and Lezgins), the capture of a fleet, and a voyage by ship to the mouth of the Kura – seems more convincing. If only it were backed up by even a single line from the sources… but what is written in the sources merely demonstrates their authors' limited familiarity with the science of geography. Here is what Ibn Miskawayh, a younger contemporary of the events who recounted them to us in the greatest detail, writes on the matter: 'They (the Rus'. – *O.V.*) sailed across the sea that borders their country, crossing it as far as the great river known as the Kura.' And what are we to make of this 'route'? The Kura, like the Volga, is known to flow into the Caspian Sea. In the mid-10th century, the Caspian did not 'border' the Rus' country by a single metre of coastline.

It is also not entirely clear exactly when the campaign against Berdaa was undertaken (meanwhile, as we shall see, a correct understanding of its objectives depends largely on this). Ibn Miskawayh and many historians, both medieval and modern, following him, cite the year 943 as the date of the campaign. Abu al-Faraj gives the year as 944, and this seems more likely, since Ibn Miskawayh himself states that the Rus' were in Berdaa in the year of Emir Tuzun's death, who died in 945, and no source claims that the Rus' detachment's stay in the Transcaucasus lasted longer than a year.

As for the region being a paradise – on this point, everyone who had been there agreed. Here is what an Armenian author writes: 'The great River Kura, with its swift current, brings with it a multitude of large and small fish. It flows and empties into the Caspian Sea. The fields around it abound in grain, wine, oil, silk and cotton; there are countless olive trees. Gold, silver, copper and yellow frankincense are mined in the mountains. There are also predatory beasts: lions, tigers, leopards, wild donkeys (?) (the author seems to have got slightly carried away. Wild donkeys were not considered

predators even in the 10th century. – *O. V.*) and a multitude of birds: eagles, falcons and the like'.

The great Azerbaijani poet Nizameddin Abu Muhammad Ilyas ibn Yusuf Nizami, who was born and lived his life in the vicinity of Berdaa, in the city of Ganja, left the following enthusiastic description of his native land in his poem *Iskander-nama*, evidently inspired by local traditions and legends, on the eve of the Rus' arrival in the city:

> So beautiful is Berda that January, like May, Is a blossoming paradise within its bounds.
> There, on the hillsides in June, lilies flourish; there, the breezes prolong spring even into autumn;
> There, amongst the fragrant groves, a breeze flits about; The Kura winds round them, like a heavenly stream,
> There the land is as fertile as the valley of Eden, The 'White Garden' is brimming with the flowers of Irem; There, teeming with pheasants, the dark row of cypresses and musky willows is wondrously beautiful; There, the earth, with its green and pure mantle,
> Invites one to rest beneath the misty greenery; There, in the rich meadows and beneath the canopy of oak groves — All year round, the fragrance of life-giving herbs; There are all the birds of these warm lands. Well then… Do you want some bird's milk? It is there too.
> There, a golden rain bestows upon the ripening fields A glimmer of gold; they gleam like saffron. Whoever wanders there with joy amongst the gentle grasses Will not succumb to the poisons of earthly sorrows.

One of the chief treasures of the Berdaa region in the 10th century was the mulberry groves, where silkworms and cocoons were reared. It was a centre of large-scale silk production. By the time Russian troops appeared beneath its walls, Berdaa had been captured by Deylamite forces led by Marzuban ibn Muhammad, whom a contemporary Armenian historian refers to as Salar. This

man would have been a goldmine for any author of historical adventure novels; Robert E. Howard would gladly have devoted more than one story to his adventures. A typical ‘Conan’ figure, Marzuban began his life in a semi-wild mountain tribe, became a mercenary, then a mercenary commander, and finally a ruler. Marzuban made Berdaa, the capital of Agvan, his base, whilst his troops advanced northwards – into Shirvan and beyond, towards Derbent.

The governor Marzuban sent his deputy, at the head of a ragtag army, against the invaders who had disembarked from their boats on the banks of the Kura and set up camp in the village of Mubaraki. According to Ibn Miskawayh, this force comprised three hundred Deylamites, roughly the same number of Kurds, and some mysterious ‘vagabonds’. This small force was joined by a further five thousand volunteers – ‘fighters for the faith’. Ibn Miskawayh then makes a truly brilliant observation: ‘They were careless, unaware of the Rus’ strength, and regarded them as no different from the Armenians and Romans.’ A splendid assessment of the military prowess of the Byzantine army…

The Rus’ formed a ‘wall’ – such ‘walls’ would later be well remembered by the Byzantines during the war with Grand Prince Sviatoslav. The Alans and Lezgins evidently served the same purpose as the Pechenegs and Magyars in Prince Svyatoslav’s campaigns – their light cavalry covered the flanks of the Rus’ ‘wall’. The city’s defenders probably did indeed greatly underestimate the Rus’ – surely their parents had not told them about the northern storm of 912?! In any case, less than an hour had passed before the inhabitants of Berdaa wavered under the onslaught of the fair-haired warriors clad in chainmail, and then took to their heels. And although they fled very quickly, only those on horseback managed to reach the gates. The rest fell beneath the swords of the northern invaders.

Panic broke out in the town – no one even thought to close the gates; all the townspeople who had a mount or even just a pack animal fled in a mass exodus. The rout of their own army and the terrifying, otherworldly appearance of the conquerors struck terror into their hearts, nipping any thought of resistance in the bud.

Unlike the Slavs of the 7th century, the Russian warriors of the 10th century were almost all protected by iron chainmail or plate armour, their heads covered by spheroconical helmets crowned with plumes

made of wool or feathers – known as ‘yelovtsy’. Each carried a sword, which a Rus’ man never parted with, even in peacetime; we have already spoken of the profound impression that Rus’ blades made on the people of the East. Ibn Rusta described the Slavs’ chain mail as ‘magnificent’, whilst one of the knights of the Frankish Emperor Charlemagne, Renaud de Montauban, as recounted in the medieval poem of the same name, acquired ‘a splendid suit of chain mail from Rus’ and thus earned a reputation as an invincible warrior. In other respects, the Rus’ warriors of the mid-10th century differed little from their Slavic counterparts of three centuries earlier – the same spears and bows, the same ‘wall’, the same ‘unbearably heavy’ shields protecting not only the torso but also the legs, and the same moustaches and forelocks on their shaven heads. According to Ibn Miskawayh, the Rus’ who arrived at the walls of Berdaa carried a javelin, a spear, a shield and a sword. In addition, a Rus’ warrior’s kit included ‘a weapon resembling a dagger’, a tent pole and
a set of tools – a saw, an axe[33] and a hammer. The latter was necessary both for repairing and building the Rus’ main means of transport – wooden boats – and for the rapid erection of a fortified camp. On the whole, all this bore a strong resemblance to the equipment of Roman legionaries of the imperial era, the famous
‘Caesar’s mules’ – ‘I carry all my own gear with me’. The Rus’ polished their armour to a shine; in the chronicles and military tales of Rus’, a marching army was likened to an ice drift, whilst to the inhabitants of the Caucasian valleys, the wall of Rus’ sweeping towards them must have seemed like a mountain avalanche.

> The ruddy-cheeked Rus’ warriors were a sight to behold. They shone as brightly as the fires of magi[34]! —

exclaims Nizami in the *Iskandar-nama*. The comparison with flame is no coincidence here either – the Rus’ shields and spear shafts, banners, and cloaks – all were of the colour red, so beloved by the Rus’. A contemporary of the capture of Berdaa, the Lombard bishop and ambassador to Constantinople, Liutprand, believed that the Greeks had named the northerners ‘Rus’ – meaning ‘red’ – because of their fondness for this colour. Some researchers even tend to believe that the mention of ‘red-faced Rus’ in Nizami’s verses refers to the ritual painting of faces; but in my view, that is taking it too far. It is unlikely that any of their contemporaries would have failed to notice such a conspicuous

custom – after all, Lev the Deacon noticed the tuft of hair on Svyatoslav's shaven head and the earring in the prince's left ear, whilst Ibn Fadlan noted the tattoos (need I say more… well, perhaps I should – the custom of tattooing was completely unknown to the Scandinavians, whereas the Moravian princess Dubravka would even take bone tattoo needles with her when travelling, and in the remote countryside of Yugoslavia, peasants had tattoos exactly like those of Ibn Fadlan's Rus' people right up until the early 20th century) on the hands of the Rus' merchants he encountered. It is more likely that any fair-skinned people appeared ruddy-cheeked to the swarthy southerners; moreover, fair-haired, pale-skinned northerners burn much more quickly in the Caucasian sun. The military commander rode at the head of the column.

Depictions of 10th-century Rus' people wearing Norman semi-circular helmets—unfamiliar to Eastern European archaeology—along with Norman battle-axes, Norman round shields, and Norman beards and shoulder-length manes, should be understood as the result of artists being brainwashed by massive propaganda promoting Normanism, combined with a desire to cut corners – after all, it is easier to draw a stereotypical Viking for the hundred-and-first time than to delve into the sources to find out what the Rus' actually looked like over a thousand years ago.

Having taken the almost deserted town, the Rus' sent heralds out into the surrounding countryside, where the fleeing townspeople were hiding.

'There is no difference in faith between us and you!' they shouted. 'We seek only power. *It is our duty to treat you well* (my emphasis – *O. V.*), and yours to obey us faithfully.'

A remarkable statement. I wish I were wrong, but it seems that for many, many 'democratically elected rulers', the very idea of having any obligations towards those they govern would come as a staggering revelation. The Rus', however, understood this very well even back then, in the first half of the 10th century. As for 'there is no disagreement in faith' – this, of course, does not mean that the Rus' were Muslims. All sources recounting the capture of Berda unanimously refer to the northern conquerors as pagans. They were ordinary pagans and, as such, had no intention whatsoever of forcing the local inhabitants to renounce Allah and worship Perun and Veles.

Upon hearing this announcement, the inhabitants soon returned to the city. However, I fear the Rus' came to regret this very soon.

Detachments from neighbouring regions began to approach the city – first Marzuban, who had regrouped his army after it had scattered into secluded gorges, and then the Shirvanshah. Why the latter—who had previously been defeated several times by the tireless Marzuban—fancied he could wrest the fortress of Berdaa from his conquerors is, to me, dear reader, a complete mystery. The Rus invariably went out to meet them and invariably emerged victorious. As for the town's inhabitants, crowding upon the ramparts, they cheered on their fellow believers with shouts. And if only it had been mere shouts – a rabble of ragged outcasts poured out of the city gates in pursuit of the Rus, hurling stones at their backs whilst shouting 'Allahu Akbar!'. The Rus once again addressed the townspeople with a proclamation reminding them that they should mind their own business and not interfere in the relations between the two conquering tribes – the Deilimites and the Rus. The nobility and the wealthy, who had something to lose, took this to heart, but the common people and the rabble would not be appeased, interpreting, as was their custom, the Rus' tolerance as weakness. Yet the tolerance of their forebears is truly astonishing. Reader, in your opinion, on which occasion would a modern commander, in the place of the Rus' commander, have ordered his soldiers to fire into the crowd and taken hostages from among the civilian population?

I, too, think it would be the very first time.

But even the Rus' extraordinary patience came to an end when the fanatics, emboldened by their impunity, finally resorted to murder. In one of the gardens of Berdaa, a crowd surrounded five Rus', among whom was a beardless lad, the son of one of the army's commanders. The Muslims were desperate to capture one of them alive, but the northern warriors refused to surrender – they fought until they fell dead, each managing to kill many Muslims in the process. The boy, who was the last to remain – evidently his older comrades had been covering him – realising that he might be taken prisoner, scrambled up a tree and stabbed himself to death there with a dagger. Such were the customs of the Russian warriors, as reflected in the 'History' of Leo the Deacon and in Russian epics (the bogatyr Dunay, Danilo Lovchanin). And even the Russian boyar Alexander Peresvet, in whose native forests of Bryansk the last pagan funeral pyres were still smouldering, before the pen of a monk-scribe clothed him in a black monastic habit instead of 'gilded armour', spoke thus: 'Better for us to fall upon our own swords than to be taken captive by the pagans.'

After this, the Rus' heralds ordered the inhabitants of Berdaa to leave the town. Those townspeople who had pack animals on which they could load their families and possessions did so, but the overwhelming majority, having completely forgotten their recent mortal fear of the foreigners, did not take the warning seriously.

And quite in vain. By the end of the third day, the northerners had spread out across the town, killing anyone who resisted. Presumably, those suspected of involvement in the murders were also killed. Those who offered no resistance were herded into the market square; the women and children were sent to the fortress, whilst the men – ten thousand of them – were taken to the central mosque of Berdaa and ordered to pay a ransom for their release.

Even under these circumstances, the majority of Berdaa's inhabitants were unwilling – Ibn Miskawayh emphasises that they were specifically 'unwilling', not 'unable' – to ransom themselves and their families. Moreover, a certain Christian, Ibn Samun (Simeon? Simon? Samson? A Syrian? an Armenian?), who attempted to act as a mediator between the Rus' and their captives and had even managed to negotiate an average ransom of twenty dirhams, for which a captive could redeem himself and his family, received, instead of gratitude for the mortal risk he had taken for the sake of his fellow citizens (the Rus' were not particularly well disposed towards the inhabitants of Berdaa and could hardly have distinguished the Christian Ibn Samun from his Muslim compatriots), he received indignant accusations from those on whose behalf he had been striving: they claimed he dreamt of nothing more than putting Christians on an equal footing with Muslims in the payment of the jizya. As one might easily guess, Ibn Samun spat on those stupid and ungrateful fanatics – and the negotiations came to an end. Those who were sensible paid the ransom, collected their families and left the city. As proof that the ransom had been paid, the Rus' who had received the valuables would issue the townsperson who had paid *a seal stamped on clay*, which protected him from any claims by other Rus'.

Some people still regard our ancestors as savages… yet, judging by the account of Ibn Miskawayh, they were people of angelic character, chivalrous valour and great intellect. It is someone else who looks like a savage here!

V.V. Bartold, a distinguished scholar who was, unfortunately, influenced by the myths of Normanism, was perplexed by the behaviour of the Rus' (whom he naturally regarded as Normans) in Berdaa: 'The details of the account show that the capture of Berdaa was carried out *with greater organisation*

forces than the Norman raids on Christian and Muslim cities in Europe (emphasis added here and below – *O.V.*). In accounts of these raids, the Normans are usually portrayed as merciless barbarians, exterminating and burning everything in their path*; there was scarcely a case in Europe where pagan Normans, upon capturing a large city, would declare to the inhabitants that they would safeguard their lives and property*'. What can one say in reply to this distinguished historian? He is absolutely right. Moreover, 'there was scarcely a case in Europe where pagan Normans' seized a territory several times larger than Scandinavia in both area and population, whilst at the same time modestly keeping quiet, making no mention to their descendants or contemporaries of their unprecedented victories and conquests—neither in a saga, nor in a ballad, nor in a single line of writing. That pagan Normans would collect tribute from the conquered, and even determine its amount, rather than plundering and taking everything. That pagan Normans would cast aside their own gods, the fierce Aesir, and begin to worship local pagan idols. That the pagan Normans, a generation after the conquest, would adopt the language, names and customs of the conquered peoples, including those considered, from a Scandinavian perspective, so shameful as tattooing or shaving the head and beard (the word 'beardless' in Viking-era Scandinavia was a deadly insult on a par with 'manure-bearded', whilst a shaved head was the mark of a slave).

In short, until honest historians shake off the Normanist delusion and realise once and for all what the Russian chronicles and legends, Byzantine chrysobulls and Norse sagas, the notes of Arab geographers and Western chronicles evidence from linguistics and archaeology – namely, that the Varangians and Rus' were never Scandinavians, but were Baltic Slavs – their understanding of the beginnings of Russian history will be a continuous chain of such perplexities.

As for the seal issued to a resident of Berdaa who had paid a ransom, it should be recalled that guests and envoys of the Rus' carried seals with them in accordance with the treaty of 944. Seal rings bearing various symbols are frequently found in Rus' in the druzhina burial mounds of that period. Finally, it was Slavic merchants who introduced the word 'pitshaft' to Scandinavia (and, evidently, the concept itself, for no seal rings have been found in the depths of Norse burial mounds).

Those who persisted and clung to their money, however, faced a grim fate. The Rus' simply slaughtered everyone who remained in the mosque, whilst their women and children were taken as slaves. Only those who, one night during their captivity, tapped their way through the floor of the mosque to uncover the channel of an old irrigation ditch—which the builders had been too lazy to fill in—managed to escape by removing the tiles and making their way through this underground passage.

It is a remarkable psychological trait – these people *said nothing to* their fellow captives. Although, judging by the fact that they themselves chose to slip away from the doomed mosque, they could not have failed to realise what awaited their fellow citizens.

I wonder – did they sleep soundly afterwards? Did they not have nightmares of the old mosque's doors, oozing with ripe cherries, and did the voices of Grandfather Hasan and Uncle Ahmed not call out to them from the darkness? And surely they must have told someone else about it…

As for the Russians – well, yes, they acted cruelly. But they did everything they could to prevent it; they did far more than anyone else would have done in their place. The Muslim conquerors in Iran did not behave in this way, nor would the Christian crusaders in the Holy Land, nor would the soldiers of the victorious nations in Japan and Germany at the end of the Second World War.

Here, admittedly, Ibn Miskawayh casually level a false accusation against our ancestors, and, more likely, without any malicious intent, simply out of ignorance. He claims that, having taken the wives and children of the fallen into their fortress, they

'committed adultery with the women and youths'. Well, that is utter nonsense. Nothing of the sort ever happened; not a single source confirms it. As for the women, naturally, there was something – in this regard, the customs of our forebears were extremely simple; I was struck at the time by a scene in Ibn Fadlan's account, where a Russian merchant in Bulgar, making love to his woman, does not interrupt his activity when another man comes to visit him, and continues, so to speak, to the bitter end in the presence of the guest. But as for the 'young boys' – that is utter nonsense. Among the Scandinavians, this vice was known, though it was regarded as utterly shameful. But among the Slavs, there wasn't even a word for it! N.M. Galkovsky, in the chapter 'Marriage' of his work, notes that 'in the early centuries of Christianity, unnatural vices were very rarely found among us'. It would be more accurate to say that in those days they were known only through teachings and lists of confessional questions brought from Byzantium. From

Galkovsky's work, it is perfectly clear where this abomination originated in our lands and who was its first purveyor: the monks from God-saved Byzantium! The first reliably identified sodomite in Rus' turns out to be… Zosima, Metropolitan of the Russian Church in the 15th century. A hundred years later, Muslim soldiers from the tsar's army were added to the list. Yet not a single critic of Russian paganism attributed this abomination to it. Pagan Rus' was no earthly paradise, but there were forms of depravity from which it was entirely free, and 'adultery with young boys' was among them. Ibn Miskawayh, however, simply speaks as a man of his own people, culture and time. He finds it hard to imagine how one could refrain from raping captive boys – and so he attributes this to the Rus'. Well, he is not the first to judge others by his own standards, and, alas, he will not be the last.

Attempts to drive the Rus out of the Berdaa stronghold by military force proved unsuccessful. Time and again, Muslim rulers—first and foremost the restless Marzuban—led their armies to the walls of the capital, Agvan. Time and again, the Rus took to the field—and routed the Muslim hordes. It never actually came to a siege. One incident is particularly noteworthy: Marzuban attempted to lure the Rus into a trap by feigning retreat – and only with great difficulty was he able to stop his own soldiers, who were fleeing from the fearsome pagans. The feigned retreat nearly turned into a real one. Only Marzuban's personal example – as he almost single-handedly rushed to meet the advancing Rus – prevented this. However, the ambush was not a great success all the same – Marzuban was repelled once more. One can only marvel at this man's ant-like tenacity. Meanwhile, the Rus… expanded their territories by capturing the city of Maraga. Apparently, the experience at Berdaa had served as a lesson – this time, the Rus made no declaration of their intentions, nor did they attempt to negotiate with the inhabitants; they simply arrived and took what they wanted, killing those who resisted and sparing the rest. Judging by the lack of any mention of resistance to the Rus' in Maraga, this course of action proved far more straightforward and comprehensible to the local inhabitants.

Unfortunately, the Rus, who were invincible in battle, were struck by a new calamity in Maraga – according to reports by Arab authors, they contracted some kind of contagious disease there, which began to decimate their ranks. Finally, they were forced to leave the region, having first burnt in a bonfire

the spoils they could not carry away. The Rus' departed undefeated, having retained their spoils, but their losses were too great; the plague showed no sign of abating, and dire news was reaching them from their homeland – Grand Prince Igor had perished, and turmoil was beginning. By the river they were met by the shipwrights and three hundred men-at-arms, who had been guarding the ships all this time. Another curious detail: either three hundred Rus' were hardly enough to defend a camp and ships that were scarcely fortified against the Muslim armies approaching Berdaa, or these 'fighters for the faith' were far more concerned with 'the land of the Prophet's sons, which is trampled under the filthy feet of the infidels', were far more concerned with the fortress of Berdaa, which was crammed with booty and captives. Having divided the spoils, the Rus set sail for home and, as Abu al-Fida reports, returned safely.

One Armenian historian, a contemporary of these events, adds that the 'disease' that struck the conquerors was in fact the result of sabotage by the captive women, who had poisoned the water in the captured fortresses. Upon learning of this, the Rus' beheaded the captives – one can be certain that Muslim women who had not the faintest inkling of these atrocities also paid with their lives for the actions of the fanatical 'shahidahs' – and left Berdaa.

To be honest, dear reader, there are not that many instances in world history where the conqueror appears wiser, kinder and nobler than the vanquished, especially when described by a fellow tribesman and co-religionist of the latter. And although the story of the siege of Berdaa ended rather sadly, I am nevertheless pleased that, in one of these rare instances, the conquerors were my ancestors.

And once again, the same question we have already asked ourselves: who were they, where did they come from, and why did they come? I dismiss, for obvious reasons, the widely held theory that the Rus' were led by that very 'Kh-l-gv' from the Cambridge document. Characters from, to put it mildly, works of fiction do not engage in historical deeds. That leaves three theories. The first is that it was some major chieftain independent of Igor. A subordinate of Igor, the Grand Prince of Kyiv, who had temporarily gone 'off on his own'. And, finally, one of Igor's voivodes, acting on his orders.

I simply have nothing to say about the first theory. There is no evidence either for or against it. Of course, avengers of the avengers could have emerged in Tmutorokan. Precisely mature men, by those standards even almost elderly

But most likely – both.

As for the second and third versions, they are quite plausible – I would even readily agree with the pre-revolutionary historian Nechvolodov that the Grand Prince of Kyiv thus decided to settle the score with the Caspian Muslims for the massacre of 912, for although they were not his subjects, they were still Rus', and so their blood and Kagan-bek's betrayal should not, could not, go unavenged. If only Berdaa had had any connection whatsoever to that massacre. It would have been more logical to plunder one of the cities of Khazaria, paying particular attention to the Muslims. But the Rus' appeared in Berdaa immediately after the successful campaign of 944. I am convinced that this campaign actually took place – it was not for nothing that Constantine Porphyrogenitus implored his son to prevent an alliance between the 'Russ' and the 'Paisenaks' – the Pechenegs. And such an alliance against the Byzantine Empire is mentioned twice in the sources – during the reign of Sviatoslav, whom the unfortunate Caesar did not live to see, having been poisoned by that very same son and daughter-in-law, whom he had picked up in a seedy harbour tavern, and in the account of his father's second, successful campaign. Why on earth did the Roman envoys come to Kyiv in 944 to conclude a treaty with the Rus'? And the treaty itself, whatever our 'objective' historians may say, does not really resemble the culmination of the Grand Prince of Kyiv's utter rout in that ill-fated year of 941, when his ships were set ablaze by 'Greek fire', he himself and the remnants of his druzhina barely escaped, whilst the captured Rus' were beheaded at the hippodrome in Constantinople. Could a Grand Prince who had been utterly routed really have demanded that the Rus' who had arrived in Constantinople without his letter of authorisation be sent back in chains? And indeed, the very earliest descriptions of Igor – 'he was valiant and wise' (Novgorod Chronicle I Chronicle), 'Old[35] Igor… is now remembered and spoken of for his valour and bravery' (Metropolitan Hilarion, In Praise of Kagan Vladimir) – bear no resemblance whatsoever to the image of a mediocrity and a failure adopted by our historians. Could such a memory have survived of a man whose only achievements were the burning of his own fleet by Byzantine fire-throwers and an inglorious death at the hands rebellious Drevlians ([36]), who had revolted because of his own foolish greed? The question, I think, dear reader, is entirely rhetorical. So, after receiving a ransom from the Greeks, Grand Prince Igor 'commands'

the Pechenegs to wage war against Bulgaria, sets off for home himself, and sends some of his men deep into the Transcaucasus, to the distant city of Berdaa.

The question begs to be asked – why? The simplest explanation, of course, is simply to assume that some chieftain felt the tribute was insufficient and decided to make up for it in Berdaa. But… surely there were no closer places, such as Bulgaria itself? Bulgaria is a large country, after all, and there would be plenty for the Pechenegs to plunder, as well as for his own retinue. Or he could have raided the Crimea, following the example of Prince Bravlin.

That, incidentally, is precisely what a vassal of the Grand Prince of Kyiv would have done had he resolved, so to speak, to supplement his income with 'ill-gotten' gains. Therefore, the strange, almost unbelievable patience shown towards the inhabitants of that distant land and the tenacious efforts to hold on to the captured Berdaa point rather to a voivode (or junior prince) carrying out his sovereign's orders. Thus, the third version appears to be the most likely.

Academician A.P. Novoseltsev put forward a witty conjecture regarding the reasons for the Rus' attack on Berdaa: Marzuban ibn Muhammad and his Dailamites were enemies of the Arab states – enemies of Byzantium. Consequently, an attack on them was intended to assist the Eastern Roman Empire's enemies without formally breaching the peace treaty with that empire. If this were indeed the case, it might suggest that the Rus' had mastered the intricacies of diplomacy and international politics. However, the very same thought prevents me from fully agreeing with the esteemed academic: why, in that case, did they not sweep through the Deylemite territories with the same fiery whirlwind of thermonuclear fury that the Rus' unleashed upon the shores of the Caspian Sea in 912? Why were the Rus so patient with the antics of the local population and so keen to hold on to the lands they had conquered?

To be honest, reader, I have a theory as to why the Rus' tried so hard to establish a foothold in Berdaa and secure the support of its inhabitants.

What, do you think, dear reader, was the Rus' sovereign thinking when he made peace with the empire in 944? I suppose it was that, as the Old Rus' proverb goes, 'peace lasts until war, and war lasts until peace'. Or, in the words of the Roman Vegetius, 'si vis pacem, para bellum' – if you want peace, prepare for war.

And what is needed for a new, more successful war against the Eastern Roman Empire? How did this empire burn the fleet of Grand Prince

Igor's fleet in 941 and plunged his allies, the Varangian princes, into deep contemplation in 944?

Bulgaria has much of what is found in Berdaa: gold, silver. Even silk can be found if one rummages through the chests of the boyars and the church sacristies. There is just one thing missing in Bulgaria – and you won't find it anywhere except Azerbaijan. Moreover, 'it' has the peculiarity that you cannot hoist it onto your back and carry it off straight away – which means you have to come to an agreement with the locals, whatever the cost.

Oil.

Oil, dear reader. The main component of *'Greek fire*'. The super-weapon of the Orthodox Caesars. The napalm of the Middle Ages. The only weapon capable of defeating the fleet of the Sons of the Falcon. The weapon with which Rus' will be invincible.

It seems very likely, reader, that Grand Prince Igor did not believe the assurances with which the Byzantines usually regaled the 'barbarians' who were curious about the nature and origin of 'Greek fire': 'In this matter, too, God, through an angel, enlightened and instructed the great first Christian basileus, Saint Constantine.' This is from *On the Administration of the Empire*, a book which another Constantine, the 'Purple-Born', wrote in vain for his wayward son. Constantine goes on to instruct his son to tell the barbarians a blatant lie – that the commandment never to reveal the secrets of 'Greek fire' to anyone has been inscribed on the throne of Hagia Sophia since the time of Constantine – which, as the Caesar knew full well, could not be true – the church was built almost two centuries after the death of the Emperor Equal-to-the-Apostles, and there were no inscriptions regarding 'Greek fire' on its altar. As for 'Greek fire', as Constantine himself mentions in the same treatise, it was invented by a Greek named Callinicus of Heliopolis, during the reign of yet another Constantine – Constantine IV – in the seventh century. When the interests of the empire were at stake, its rulers had no qualms about invoking, in vain, either the most sacred relics of the Orthodox faith or the heavenly angels. The Orthodox chronicler fell for this ruse, diligently recording the tale of 'heavenly lightning', which the cunning Greeks supposedly had at their disposal. Although the origin
'Greek fire' was entirely earthly, and even subterranean. Scholars dispute its composition. Some say it was simply highly distilled petroleum, heated to the required temperature and

ejected under pressure from a siphon, to the ‘spout’ of which a lit lamp was held. Other researchers believe the composition of the Byzantine Empire’s ‘wonder weapon’ to be more complex – according to them, it contained, in addition to oil, saltpetre, sulphur and rosin. Saltpetre – which is also a component of gunpowder – made the mixture’s combustion process extremely violent. Sulphur, which ignites at low temperatures, helped to set the ‘cocktail’ alight, whilst rosin thickened it, preventing it from flowing out of the siphons. The resulting infernal mixture burned even on water, and could only be extinguished with vinegar. The terrifying power of this weapon of mass destruction – its effect was particularly monstrous at sea, when wooden ships found themselves surrounded on all sides by a lake of flame riding the waves – was experienced first-hand by the warriors of Grand Prince Igor during the campaign of 941, when they came up against the fire-breathing fleet of Theophanes Syncellus. Yet the main component of this ‘Medieval napalm’ was, in fact, oil.

It is curious that the scribe of *Born in Purple* remarks in passing that ‘Greek fire’ was ‘frequently requested from us’. Who could have asked ‘them’ for this dreadful weapon? Historians commenting on these words of the crowned chronicler have no doubt that this refers to Grand Prince Igor, who made such a request during the peace negotiations of 944. But might this not have been a ruse, designed—to use the chronicle’s own expression—
‘fool’ the arrogant Caesar, to lull him into a false sense of security – since
the ‘Russ’ are asking, it must mean they do not know the secret? Meanwhile, the Rus’ expedition was already on its way to the oil-rich lands of Berdaa.

I have already discussed in my book *Svyatoslav* why I am convinced that the death of the heroic prince’s father reeks of church incense, and I have written about the Christian connection and Olga’s role. Now I am convinced: this incense was made in Constantinople, and the Christian trail leads to Byzantium. I had a hunch as to *who* killed the Son of the Falcon. Now, dear reader, I think I know *why* he was killed.

And who undertook this most crucial task? To whom did the Son of the Falcon entrust the task of procuring for Rus’ that ‘heavenly lightning’ of subterranean origin, with which the Greeks had set fire to the Rus’ ships?

No, reader, this question is by no means difficult to answer.

Which of the leading figures of the Rus' state is absent from the treaty of 944, which lists in detail a host of individuals who never again appear anywhere in the pages of the chronicle? Whose retinue, in the following year, 945, outshone even the Grand Prince's court with the splendour of their garments – and thus had visited a land more generous with spoils than the terrified Greek king was with gifts?

Any reader familiar with the chronicle will already have guessed the answer to these questions.

Sveneld is one of the most enigmatic figures in early Russian history. A voivode who served three generations of Grand Princes of Kyiv – Igor, Igor's son Sviatoslav, and Sviatoslav's son Yaropolk.

Incidentally, there is another 'argument' in his favour, though it is precisely this that would not have convinced me very much – in the poem *Iskander-nama* by Nizami, whom we have already mentioned, the leader who led the Rus' people from Berdaa to their homeland is a certain Kental or Kintal. Some researchers (for example, V.V. Kozhinov) believe that this name is very similar to the name Sveneld. Personally, I do not share this view, if only because the real name of the voivode serving three generations of the Grand Princes of Kyiv is, after all, probably Sveneld – Greek sources refer to him as Sfangel and Sfenkel, and this completely undermines the already tenuous similarity. Secondly, the latest translations suggest that the word should be read not as 'Kintal' or 'Kental', but as 'kenaz' – in other words, quite simply, the title of the leader of the Rus', rendered in Arabic script: prince!

I think I have already complained, dear reader, about what an agonising ordeal it is to read Slavic words recorded by the Arabs?

But alas – it came to nothing. The Grand Prince of Kyiv, Igor, perished, and Sveneld hurried back to Rus' with his druzhina, having never managed to produce
'Greek fire' [37] . Berdaa was left in ruins.

> But Berda was not overthrown. The hand of the
> wind Carried away from it both brocade and silk.
> The roses that had blazed scarlet crumbled there,
> There were no more daffodils there, no more pomegranates.
> Had you rushed to its groves, entered its valley,
> You would find nothing but splinters and streams[38] .

Yes, this is Nizami again. Another sad outcome is the graves of the Rus' who died from an unknown plague. After the pagan army had departed, the local inhabitants dug up their graves and pulled out the swords,

'which are still in great demand today, owing to their sharpness and superiority', writes Ibn Miskawayh, who died in 1030 – that is to say, the locals continued to use the blades dug from the Rus' burial mounds for another half-century! Given the terror – and justifiably so – that epidemics inspired in those centuries, this is a telling assessment of the quality of the Russian blades. As for the character of the local inhabitants – we seem to have already established that. It is hardly surprising that such individuals would raid graves for profit. After all, many of them ended up in the grave themselves simply because they were unwilling to part with their money, or – even more astonishingly – because they did not want their neighbour (Ibn Samun and the other Christians of Berdaa) to spend any more than they did.

As for the lessons of history to be drawn from this saga – well, there are certain categories of people, let's call them that, before whom it is utterly pointless to scatter the pearls of nobility. People who understand only the language of force and cruelty. Therefore, it is better to reserve nobility for those who are capable of understanding and appreciating it – or at least recognising it, without mistaking it for weakness or, worse still, cowardice. And with those categories of people, one must converse only in terms they can grasp.

And yet, what a pity, a painfully deep pity, that Grand Prince Igor and his commander Sveneld did not succeed! How history might have been different had the young pagan power of the Sons of the Falcon come into possession of the weapon which the Romans passed off to the barbarians as 'heavenly lightning bolts', bestowed upon the empire's founder by none other than the Archangel Michael himself. And what a sovereign Rus' lost in that ill-fated year of 945…

Chapter 4
The Leopard-Ruler by the Caucasus Mountains

The first in a constellation of 'fantastic travellers'. An embassy to the West. How the Slavic name became a mark of slavery. Sviatoslav's first victory and its terrifying alternatives. The chronicle of the Grand Prince's eastern campaign. The account of Ibn Hawqal. The mysterious barbarians of the Greek toparch. The Prince-Pardus. Spheng of Tmutorokan, son of Svyatoslav.

…Div calls out before the calamity
Ardavde, Korsun, Pomorye, Posurozhye, the
Land unknown spreads the news to Stribozh:
Awaken the birds with a groan and let the beasts' howl rise.

Maximilian Voloshin, 'The Storm'

Following the mysterious death of the Son of the Falcon in the Derevsk forests, Rus' external position was greatly weakened. It is time to stop telling fairy tales about the 'unprecedented honour' with which Olga was allegedly received in Constantinople. Firstly, half a century ago, M.V. Levchenko pointed out that the rulers of the City of Kings received and bestowed gifts upon Olga by no means as a head of state. 'Armenian and Iberian feudal lords, Hungarian chieftains, and the Bulgarian Tsar Peter were presented with far more generous gifts during their visits to Constantinople,' notes Levchenko. According to the strictest Byzantine diplomatic etiquette, Olga was received as… an ambassador. She was ranked below the tribal chieftains of the semi-wild nomadic Hungarians! In fact, Constantine the Purple-Born himself writes quite explicitly about this, describing Olga's reception as very similar to that accorded shortly before to the ambassador

Saracens. Secondly, I would add one more point: I do not recall the rulers of Rus' before Olga ever having gone to an embassy themselves! The Caesar actually sent envoys to Kyiv to Grand Prince Igor, whereas his widow Olga set off for Constantinople in person – and yet people try to pass this off as a diplomatic achievement. Incidentally, a sovereign who does not travel abroad very often is a good ruler. No, honestly, one begins to see a grain of truth in the conviction, as listed by Sir George Fraser in his famous *The Golden Bough*,
of 'primitive' peoples—namely, that a ruler should not leave the borders of his realm—from a list such as this: Peter the Great; Alexander Pavlovich, whom Pushkin characterised as 'a weak and cunning ruler', whilst Leskov dealt him an even more scathing blow by calling him 'Tsar Alexander'; Nikita Sergeyevich, 'a corn-cob chatterbox', and Mikhail Sergeyevich (touch wood, may his name not be mentioned at night). From each of these
'fantastic travellers', to use M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin's phrase, Russia suffered for a long time (and is still suffering from the last one to this day), and it was a blessing when a sufficiently resolute sovereign came to replace him, capable of keeping the country from the brink of turmoil, as Nicholas Pavlovich did. What happened otherwise is clearly evident from the consequences of Peter the Great's reign – the ruin and enslavement of the people, bureaucrats who openly and shamelessly plundered the country, foreigners plundering the country's wealth, the loathsome infighting among power factions, and the haughty contempt of neighbours who had until recently trembled at the mere mention of the Russian name. And it seems that it was Saint Olga, Equal to the Apostles, who first opened the list of 'fantastic travellers'.

The next manifestation of her notorious 'statesmanlike and political genius' was the dispatch of an embassy to the King of the Germans, and shortly afterwards to Otto, the first Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Not only was this power the most formidable enemy of the Slavs in the West, ravaging the native lands of Olga and Sviatoslav's ancestors,
the 'Varangian Coast', but it also utterly slaughtered the populous Slavic towns and reduced the magnificent temples of the Slavic gods to ashes. It was also one of the strongholds of the Rakhdonites, and their position within the state is perfectly illustrated by a small detail – Emperor Otto's WIFE bore the resounding name… JUDITH! It was still

half a millennium. Emperors and kings, acting on complaints from the Rachdonites, even forbade bishops (!) under under severe punishment convert to Christianity countless slaves, whom the Rahdonites brought to Europe – for slaves who had been baptised would have had to be set free. ‘What slaves, and from where?’ you may ask, dear reader. Well, I shall answer. ‘Sklave’ in German and ‘slaef’ in Dutch, the English ‘slave’ and the French ‘esclave’, and ‘esclavo’ in Spain mark the shameful and dreadful journey of the Rakhdonite caravans. In Portuguese ‘escravo’, familiar to Russians if only from the opening credits of the TV series *Izaura the Slave* – their final trace. The name of the Slav has been transformed, from the heavy hands of the slave traders and their crowned patrons, into a mark of slavery.

And it was to these very people that Olga, ‘Helena, Queen of the Rugians’, sent envoys (thankfully, she did not go herself this time – apparently, she had learnt a thing or two about humility in Constantinople) with a request that her country be granted ‘teachers of the Christian faith’. In those days, this meant acknowledging oneself as a vassal, a spiritual daughter of the one to whom one was appealing, and one’s own country, accordingly, as a province of his realm. Naturally, Olga-Helena’s invitation was met with great enthusiasm – just imagine, for nothing at all, gaining a realm whose territory was almost twice the size of your own – who would turn that down! The only one who felt no such enthusiasm was a certain Adalbert of Trier, who was dispatched – not alone, of course – to establish a new Christian order in the lands of the pagan Rus’. The reputation of these barbarians as fierce and stubborn in their idolatry evidently instilled in the German serious doubts about his own conquering… I beg your pardon, his own missionary abilities.

Poor Adalbert turned out to be a prophet – fortunately for Rus’. Had his ‘mission’ been successful… I do not even know which of the possible outcomes in that case to consider the most likely, and which the worst. Two main scenarios emerge – in the first, events unfold as they did in the Varangian Pomorye, which fell under the heavy hand of Otto’s successors. Some five hundred years later, in Minsk, Kyiv and Novgorod, people speak mainly German, at Grunwald, instead of Russian warriors from Vitebsk and Smolensk, knights from Vitburg and Smolnstadt arrive – naturally, under the black-and-white banners of the Order – whilst in the 20th century, the Slavic past of Eastern Europe can only be guessed at in the names of rivers and cities – just as

we recognise Drozdany in Dresden, Branibor in Brandenburg, Lipetsk in Leipzig today; and only in the remote Polesie wilderness, the Carpathian Mountains and on the shores of the White Sea do tiny enclaves of the Dregoviches, Dulebs and Ilmen Slavs huddle – just as, in our reality, a few communities of Lusatian Sorbs live in Germany, the pitiful remnants of the great, rich and glorious world of the Slavic Varangians. In the second scenario, the Rakhdonites from the German convoys soon throw open the gates of Kyiv by night to the armoured cavalry of their co-religionists from Itil and Sarkel. The Russian cities suffer the same fate as the fortified settlements of Semikarakorsk and Right-Bank Tsimlyansk – 'And the sons of Israel plundered all the spoils of those cities and the livestock for themselves; but they put all the people to the sword, so that they destroyed them all, leaving not a single soul' (Isaiah, 17:14). Prices for Slavic slaves on the world market plummet by an order of magnitude. In both cases, Rus' ceases to exist. As for Khazaria, having grown rich through the plunder of the vanquished, it will endure for another three centuries, continuing to pit neighbouring tribes against one another – until the Mongol hordes, descendants of Genghis Khan, sweep in from the east.

Fortunately, this did not happen, thanks to which I am able to write this book in the Russian language, using the Russian Cyrillic alphabet, and you, the reader, are able to read it. Our ancestors were not left to rot in a castle dungeon, were not forced to renounce the name and language of their forebears, were not hacked to pieces in burning Kyiv by Kagan-Bek's mercenaries, and were not sold with a 'slave' tag on their chests in Córdoba, Venice, Cairo or Baghdad.

This came about thanks to Sviatoslav, son of Igor, who had now come of age. The young prince had grown old enough to respectfully remove his unwise mother from power, preventing her from continuing to bring shame upon herself and Rus'. Adalbert, who had arrived in Kyiv with detachments of well-armed 'theologians' and intended to take the realm of the Sons of the Falcon under his 'spiritual care', was met with such fervour that the poor fellow—already ordained in advance as a bishop of Rus'—barely managed to make his escape from his would-be 'flock'. 'And many of his companions perished,' – the 'Chronicles of Regino's Continuator' bitterly laments the treachery of the Rus' 'The Chronicles of Regino's Successor'. And a younger contemporary of Adalbert, Olga and Sviatoslav, Thitmar of Merseburg, as if foreseeing that admirers of the 'equal-to-the-Apostles' princess would attribute the expulsion of Adalbert's crusading band from

Kyiv to her so-called ‘wisdom’, clarifies that it was *the pagans* who drove out the hapless ‘bishop’. Let those who have ears, hear. And it is a great pity that, so far, only the Ukrainians – to their credit – have erected a monument to Sviatoslav the Brave, for it is to this, his first feat, that not only they but all the Slavs of Eastern Europe owe their very existence.

His next move was an attack on the Khazar Khaganate. Rus’ had too many grievances against its southern neighbour, not only for the treachery of 912, but also for centuries of trading in Slavic slaves, for the terrible tribute exacted from the subjugated Slavic tribes – ‘one white maiden from every household’ (Radziwill Chronicle), and for the extermination of the princely lineages of the Vyatichi, Radimichi and Severians. For the counterfeit Arab coins that were minted in the capital of the Khaganate in the state mints specifically ‘for trade with the northern and north-western neighbours’, as numismatic experts write. Looking at a map, it is not difficult to see that it was indeed the Slavs who were such neighbours to Khazaria. Incidentally, in many European cities in those days, attempting to pay with counterfeit coins was punishable by a gruesome execution. Who knows how many Slavic traders, unsuspecting, carried their own death sentences in their purses as they travelled westwards, coins obtained from the cunning Rakhdonites in exchange for amber-coloured wax or silvery furs from the Russian forests.

The chronicle tersely reports that, it is said, Sviatoslav set out against the Vyatichi, and then, without fighting them or imposing a tribute, from their lands – against the Khazars; and the latter came out to meet him, led by their prince, the khagan (‘prince’ in Turkic is bek, and the army was most likely led by the khagan-bek rather than the sacred khagan), and in battle Sviatoslav prevailed, capturing the ‘city’ (capital) of the Khazars and the White Tower, and defeating the Yases, Alans and Kasogs. The Novgorod Chronicle recounts this with a slight addition – Prince Sviatoslav ‘brought’ the Yases and Kasogs to Kyiv. Whether as captives for a sort of triumphal display, or as allies – the chronicler does not specify; it seems to me, however, that the latter is more likely. The Kasogs (Adyghe) preserved the traditions of the Ants, whilst the Alans were allies of the voivode Sveneld in his Berda expedition. Moreover, the Alans had rebelled against the Khazar Khaganate on several occasions, and it is unlikely they would have fought so fiercely on its behalf. Incidentally, might this be the origin of the Dnieper Cherkasy and the Moldavian Iasi, as well as the Old Russian Yassky Torg? Might they not have been founded by North Caucasian

warriors of Grand Prince Sviatoslav were planted in those lands? Perhaps, however, I am mistaken: for the Chechens, for example, the role of custodians of the legends about Pirion-Perun does not in the slightest prevent them from feuding with the Russians; indeed, it is Perun himself who ought to be thanked for the victory – and what better expression of this gratitude could there be than the lives of captive warriors from the Caucasian tribes on the altar of the Thunderer in Kyiv?

A younger contemporary of Grand Prince Svyatoslav, the Arab Ibn Hawqal, left a more complete account of his eastern campaign. Admittedly, his account caused no small amount of confusion amongst scholars.

Ibn Hawqal himself was, as the saying goes, a man of troubled fortune. Unlike the illustrious al-Mas'udi, he could boast neither noble birth nor inherited wealth. He wandered – and he had to travel no less than the descendant of a companion of the Prophet – not because life was easy for him. Having become embroiled in political intrigues, Ibn Hawqal was reduced to utter ruin and was forced to literally flee his hometown in 943. During the three decades of wandering that followed his flight, Ibn Hawqal travelled through virtually all the Muslim lands, from Spain to India. The fugitive summarised the results of his travels in a book with the not particularly original title *The Book of Roads and Kingdoms* – just as, you will recall, reader, the work by Ibn Khordadbeh was titled.

The only passage from this work that interests us is the one devoted to the Rus' attack on Khazaria. 'At present,' writes the Arab, 'not a trace remains of the Bulgars, the Khazars or the Burtas, for the Rus' attacked them and *appropriated these regions for themselves*.' Of course, the phrase 'not a trace remains' should be understood not in terms of the existence of the peoples listed by Ibn Hawqal, but in terms of their independence. The Khazars are mentioned in the chronicle a century later – they captured Oleg Svyatoslavich, Prince of Tmutarakan, and handed him over to the Greeks. But they had picked the wrong man to attack; the young prince was the sort of man of whom it is said: 'Throw him into the sea, and he'll swim out with a fish in his teeth.' In Byzantium, whilst in captivity, Oleg managed to find friends and allies and even secured a favourable marriage, captivating a noble Greek woman, Theophania Muzalon, with his valour and good looks. Some time later, having returned from abroad alive and unharmed 'Gorislavich' took his revenge on his tormentors – 'he cut the Cossacks down' [39] . After that, there are no further mentions of them, except that Crimea is sometimes labelled on European maps as Khazaria – 'Gazzaria' – in

out of old habit, just as certain states in America bear the names of exterminated Native American tribes. The Burtas – although they were undoubtedly remembered for their part in the massacre of the Russian militias in 912 – only vanished from the face of the earth following the Tatar-Mongol conquest. As for the Bulgars, there is nothing more to say – they are already described in the chronicles, during the reign of Sviatoslav's son, as a powerful and wealthy state. Having waged war against them, Vladimir did not even impose a tribute on them. His uncle Dobrynya, the brother of the prince's mother, the Khazar slave girl Malki, warned his nephew: 'All the captives are wearing boots. They won't pay such a tribute – let's go and look for those who wear bast shoes.' A peace treaty was concluded with Bulgaria, with a specific stipulation that Bulgar merchants were not to buy goods from boyars, princely governors, community members (ognishchany) or smerds – people from the Volga tribes subjugated by the Rus' – but were to trade only in the towns, without infringing upon the interests of Rus' merchants. Admittedly, the son of the Khazar woman did not bother to keep his word – and went to war with the Bulgars on two further occasions. Yet even this speaks to the strength and wealth of Volga Bulgaria, which are difficult to reconcile with reports of the rout and destruction of its cities by the Rus' twenty years prior to the events described. Unless, of course, Ibn Hawqal was referring to the 'Black Bulgars', the descendants of Khan Batbay, the loyal hounds of Khazaria – for these did indeed vanish from the map of Eastern Europe following Grand Prince Svyatoslav's campaign.

Even more remarkable is the circumstance noted by Ibn Hawqal – that the Rus 'appropriated' the lands of Khazaria. He goes on to refer to the 'Russian River' not as the Don, as al-Masudi does, but as the Volga-Itil. It follows, then, that the ruler of Kyiv did not 'run off' on a plundering raid, as some 'objective' historians portray the matter. He extended the Rus' borders eastwards to the Volga; he brought the lands of the khagans to the west of it under the rule of the Rus' state.

Ibn Hawqal describes the route of the Rus as follows: Bulgar (obviously, the Volga Bulgar), Khazran (obviously situated in the middle reaches of the great river), Itil and Semender, which he places between Itil and Bab-ul-Abwab, Derbent. He recounts that the Rus swept through the ancestral lands of the Khazars in the North Caucasus like a devastating whirlwind. To put it in modern terms, the Rus employed a 'scorched earth' tactic, paying particular attention to mosques, churches and synagogues. Ibn Hawqal also speaks

of the local idol-worshippers – paganism persisted in Dagestan until the 19th century – but says nothing of the destruction of their idols by the invaders. Evidently, the Rus' knew full well who their enemies were. Wherever the Rus' punitive forces passed, Ibn Hawqal notes, not without a touch of poetry, 'if anything remained, it was but a leaf on a vine'. The surviving Khazars fled in panic to the offshore islands within sight of Derbent, where they huddled in huts. The rumble of the collapsed empire reached distant lands, and Ibn Hawqal, in his own words, recorded accounts of the invasion by the northern pagans in the Ciscaucasia on the other side of the Caspian Sea, in Jurjan – ancient Hyrcania.

If the wrath of the Slavs, which had built up over the centuries, rained down so fiercely upon Semender, one can only imagine how much more terrible it must have been in Itil, the lair of the Rakhdonites, stained with the blood of thirty thousand Russian warriors in 912 and tens of thousands of Slavic slaves both before and after that year. Archaeologists are still searching for its remains – which speaks volumes. And all that remains for us is to imagine how the scarred faces of the predators on the high prows of the Russian ships were reflected in the reddened waters of the Volga – reddened not only by the glow of a massive fire – how Solomon's five-pointed shields crashed into those waters from the brick towers of Kemlyk, and how a second sun rose above those towers – the Cross of Dazhbog on the victors' banner. There is little point in dwelling at length on the fate of the Rakhdonites. Let us simply thank our ancestors for their decency. They did not dwell on the bloody details – not of a war of conquest, but of just retribution! – in dozens of books, psalms and prophecies. All that remains is a cosmically terrifying image in the epic 'Fyodor Tyryanin' – the image of the enemy's blood, which nearly consumed the hero.

> Mother Syra Zemlya parted As if in
> all four directions.
> She devoured the blood of the Jews, the Jews, the
> infidels,
> of the King of the Jews.

However, not all the Khazars perished. As reported by Ibn Hawkal, some of the Khazars fled to the islands of the Caspian Sea and beyond Derbent. Shirvanshah Muhammad

ibn Ahmad al-Azdi, who was not particularly thrilled by the influx of refugees and who evidently had some experience of dealing with the harsh northerners (could it have been gained in Berdaa?), took it upon himself to negotiate with the Rus' regarding the possibility of the remaining Khazars returning to their homeland – naturally, on condition of complete submission to their new rulers. The Rus' appear to have agreed.

What puzzled many scholars, however, was that Ibn Hawqal's manuscript does not mention the year 965 – when, according to the chronicle, the Grand Prince of Kyiv, Sviatoslav, marched against the Khazars – but rather the year 969, when, according to both the chronicle and the accounts of Byzantine chroniclers, he was already in the Balkans. Speculation arose that some other Rus' tribes were rampaging in the East. A.S. Korolev identified them as the warriors of the Chernigov ruler Pretich, mentioned in the *Tale of Bygone Years* as the leader of

'the people from that (for the people of Kyiv – *O.V.*) side of the Dnieper'. A.P. Novoseltsev believed that it was Grand Prince Sviatoslav himself who had launched an attack on the Khazars, having returned from the Danube to rescue besieged Kyiv from the Pechenegs. Others – ranging from V.V. Bartold to the author of these lines in the book *Svyatoslav* – believed that Ibn Hawqal, who had certainly never set foot in the lands ravaged by the Rus', had simply confused rumours and, on the one hand, attributed Grand Prince Sviatoslav's defeat of Khazaria to the time of the Bulgarian campaign, and on the other, transferred to the Volga Bulgars the news of the Grand Prince's severe reprisal against the Bulgarian nobility who had betrayed him – a reprisal which both the Rus' annals and the Byzantine chronicles date precisely to the year 969. However, A.N. Sakharov, in his book *The Diplomacy of Svyatoslav*, offers a simpler and more ingenious solution to the question. He draws his readers' attention to the fact that Ibn Hawqal uses the following expression: 'And owing to the income and wealth of their (North Caucasian Khazars – *O.V.*) lands, not even three years will pass before everything returns to the way it was.' Rightly doubting the prophetic abilities of an unsuccessful merchant, Sakharov believes that the translator has made a mistake here. This phrase should be read in the past tense – 'not even three years had passed, and everything had returned to the way it was' – whilst the date given by Ibn Hawqal should be taken as the time when he heard, in Jurjan, the account of the tragic fate of the Volga and Caucasian domains of the Khazar khagans.

As you can see, reader, even a simple reading of ancient sources turns out, in practice, to be a very, very difficult task.

Another mystery is posed by the Persian Ibn Miskawayh, our old acquaintance, who so thoroughly—and without sparing his fellow believers—told us about the siege of Berdav by the governor Sveneld. This time, he reports that in 965, Khazaria was attacked and its cities plundered by… the Turks. How are we to understand this? Perhaps this refers to Prince Sviatoslav's Turkic allies and vassals – the Pechenegs, for example. The same Ibn Hawkal, as we recall, describes them as the 'sword in the hands of the Rus'. It may be that the 'Turks' referred to here are in fact… the Rus. Ibn Khaldun, for instance, classifies the Rus' as Turks, and does so, it seems, on a very simple principle: since Turks live to the north of the Caucasus, then the Rus' living to the north of the Caucasus are also Turks. Similarly, to a Muscovite or a Kyivite, both the French and the English were Germans, whilst a few centuries earlier all the inhabitants of the shores of the Varangian Sea were Varangians. Conversely, al-Masudi classifies the 'tribe of Turka' as Slavs… or should this name be interpreted quite differently? Oh, what a difficult task it is to decipher Arabic writings!

We find another mention of Sviatoslav's eastern campaign in the so-called 'Note of the Toparch', the Byzantine governor of the Crimean territories—known as the Klimats—of the Eastern Roman Empire. Based on the astrological calculations of a court official mentioned in it, this note is dated to the years 964–967. In his note, the Toparch speaks of certain 'barbarians' who are not named specifically but are very recognisable. Up to a certain point, these 'barbarians' had shown 'justice' and 'lawfulness', and 'cities and peoples voluntarily joined them'. 'Now, however, all has been disrupted: they have shown injustice towards their subjects; instead of looking after the welfare of the cities under their rule and governing them in good order for their own benefit, they have set about enslaving and ruining them.' These cities, 'under the pretext of a broken oath, fell prey to violence and the sword'. In the lands neighbouring the Klimata, the barbarians destroyed ten cities and five hundred villages.

Is this not, reader, an all too familiar pattern of behaviour? The same toparch could have written the same about the Berdae – if only the Berdae had bordered Byzantine territories. But it bears a striking resemblance to the Rus'! And this – the former – sense of obligation ('it is our duty to rule over you well', remember?), and concern for the subjects, and the merciless repression of those who 'broke their oath'. And this remark about the 'voluntarily

joined' the mysterious 'barbarians'—'cities and peoples'—is very much like what our chronicle says about the Eastern European Slavs summoning Varangian Rus', and about the lands of the former Khazar tributaries, which readily, at the first word, fell under Oleg the Prophet's control. Our most 'objective' historians have been sniggering at these accounts for more than a century; but how will they now counter such treacherously convincing confirmation of the chronicles' accuracy by their favourite Byzantines? And it would be one thing if it were just Toparch—but Leo the Deacon also states the very same thing. In his account, Sviatoslav says: 'the glory that marched in the wake of the Rus' army, which easily defeated neighbouring peoples and *subjugated entire countries without bloodshed*'. Patriarch Photius reported much the same thing a century earlier.

A.N. Sakharov sees in the cities upon which the wrath was unleashed 'barbarians', Khazar refugees who had returned from the realm of the Shirvanshah and dared to breach the terms on which the sovereign of the Rus', reigning north of the Danube—as the Toparch addresses him—had permitted them to return. Here, I am afraid, I must disagree with the historian. Of course, the Khazars might well have failed to keep their promises – but did they even have the time to do so? At most, two years elapsed between Svyatoslav's campaign and the astrological investigations of the Byzantine governor. Some time must have been needed to make up their minds to ask to return, for the negotiations between the Shirvanshah Muhammad and the Rus', for the return itself… and indeed, to forget just how formidable the Rus' were and how merciless they were towards those who broke their word. Two years would certainly not have been enough for all this – for the latter, I think, not even twenty would have sufficed; moreover, if the Khazar refugees had behaved in such a way, there would have been no one a century later to round up and hand over Oleg Svyatoslavich to the Romans. In that case, the 'Kozars' would have been 'slaughtered' as early as the 10th century.

Not to mention that it is difficult to interpret as 'cities and countries' a handful of Khazars who managed to flee from the Russian druzhinas but failed to settle in the warm climate of Shirvan.

It seems to me that by 'a broken word' one should understand either the treachery of Kagan-bek Aaron, who had long since decayed in his grave beneath a stone bearing carved images of a seven-branched menorah and a shofar; or else some deeper concept. The fact is that among the Rus' and the Slavs, an oath or vow was denoted by the word 'rota'. But, as Mikhail Seryakov demonstrates in his research,

was also used to denote the very order of the world, universal justice, and the law of the universe. This, incidentally, is why the Rus' were so fierce towards those who broke their oaths – for, in their view, such people were encroaching upon the cosmos, upon the integrity of the universe. The Khazars, however—or more precisely, the 'White Khazars', the new rulers of the Khaganate—were, in the eyes of the pagan Rus', simply the embodiment of the trampling of the world order. The two peoples' worldviews were too different. The gulf between 'good' and 'bad' in the two faiths was simply too wide. Even the world itself proved too small for him.

Some treated slaves as if they were children. Even the words used to denote both groups were almost identical: chad, chelyad, otroki, holopy, khlopy, khloptsy. 'They treat their slaves well and look after them…' Ibn Rustah marvels, and attempts to explain: 'Because they trade in them.' A clumsy explanation. Few people did not trade in slaves in that century, and no one traded in them more than the rulers of the Khaganate. But for some reason, Ibn Rusta writes this only about the Rus'. Others treated children as if they were slaves. Think of the children sold by their Khazar mothers. Some swore an oath – to the enemy, the vanquished enemy! – 'as long as the world stands, as long as the Sun shines'. Others had an annual festival – Yom Kippur – for release from any oaths and promises.

'The dead know no shame' of Grand Prince Sviatoslav – and 'better a living dog than a dead lion'. '…And it is our duty to treat you well' – and 'in the cities of these peoples… leave not a single soul alive'. The selflessness of the warrior – and the Khaganate's mercenary army. The prince marching into battle at the head of his retinue – and the faceless authority of his nameless rulers. It was precisely this 'oath'-company, the Justice of the Gods, that was violated by the inhabitants of the 'barbarian' Rus' lands

'countries and cities'.

From the chronicle, the account of Ibn Hawqal and the 'Notes of a Byzantine Toparch', a fairly clear picture emerges of WHAT Grand Prince Svyatoslav did to Khazaria – including its pre-Caucasian territories. It remains to be seen exactly how he went about it. And this is indeed a serious mystery. After all, the Rus' druzhinas, even if reinforced by the Vyatich militia, could hardly have rivalled the hordes of the khagan's nomadic vassals in numbers. It is not entirely clear how they managed to defeat the nomads in their own natural habitat – the steppe. Finally, the Rus', as Eastern authors unanimously attest – the well-known Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor (6th century), Ibn Rustah and Ibn

Miskawayh (10th century)—were not skilled horsemen. They fought poorly on horseback. Leo the Deacon later says the same of our hero's warriors. How, then, did they manage to defeat the steppe warriors who had grown up in the saddle?

The first two puzzles are easier to answer. The Rus' had no intention of taking on the entire hordes of the Kagan-Bek. Just as Alexander the Great, at Gaugamela, had no intention of annihilating the loose, motley army of the Persian Empire. With a small personal retinue, he struck at the centre, targeting King Darius's 'Immortals' guard. Once the Macedonians had routed and put the king's bodyguards to flight, the rest of the army simply scattered. One must assume that matters were much the same during Svyatoslav's Eastern Campaign. The only serious opponent was the 30,000-strong mercenary force guarding the Itil – and that was all. This also answers the second riddle. Svyatoslav did not have to, or hardly had to, fight the nomads. His opponents were mercenaries whose home was not the steppe but the barracks. As for the nomadic vassals, Kagan-Bek simply did not have time to mobilise them. As already mentioned, Svyatoslav carved out his route to Itil through the lands of tribes that had never been loyal allies of the Khazars. In the lands of the Burtas, he encountered no serious resistance; in the lands of the Bulgars, he was, of course, to be welcomed with open arms.

But all this required speed. How could Svyatoslav's army – which, according to the same Deacon, consisted mainly of foot soldiers in chain mail – compete in speed with the mercenary cavalry of Khazaria? Here, the chronicle comes to our aid. It states, as is well known, that Svyatoslav 'moved lightly, like a pardus'. A 'pardus' is a cheetah, which was used in Rus' for hunting steppe game. Though lightning-fast in short-distance sprints (up to 128 km per hour), this beast tires quickly. Therefore, the cheetah was transported to the hunting grounds on horseback, in a special seat behind the saddle. And so we have arrived at the key to Svyatoslav's tactics. His heavy infantry moved from one battlefield to another on horseback! In this way, they could appear in places most unexpected to the enemy, not exhausted by a long march, but ready for battle. After all, in Rus', every man without exception knew how to ride a horse! A significant portion of the army could move

by boat as well – for, as al-Masudi noted, the Khazars had no military fleet of their own.

Be that as it may, the Khazar Khaganate, an old enemy of Rus', was defeated. The Slavic captives became free men; those among them who still remembered what freedom was like were given the opportunity to return to their homelands. The Slavs of the Don and Kuban, those very same Slavs from Mount Kavk ibn al-Fakih, were transformed from powerless, downtrodden tributaries and semi-slaves into full subjects of the Grand Prince of the Rus'. The white-stone 'condominiums' of the 'White Khazars' lay in ruins, beneath whose walls their 'black' compatriots had traded their own children. The slave markets of Byzantium and Baghdad lay deserted. The power of the Rus' princes of Tmutarakan now loomed over the Ciscaucasia. The first of them known to us was Sviatoslav's son, whose name the Byzantine chronicler Skylitzes records as 'Sfengo' (Sven? Zvenko? Zvyaga?). We would know nothing of his existence – the Rus' chroniclers make no mention of him – had it not been for the rebellion that broke out in 1015 in the Crimean territories of the Eastern Roman Empire, leading to the rise to power of the baptised Khazar, George Chula. By the time the Eastern Roman Empire had mustered its forces, the rebels had already been defeated by the Rus' forces, led by the 'brother of Vladimir, the archon of the Rus'', the enigmatic 'Sfengo'. He routed the rebels and personally took Chula captive. It is unlikely that he did so out of any warm feelings towards the Orthodox Empire; and indeed, judging by the silence of the monastic chroniclers and his clearly non-Christian name, he was most likely a pagan himself; yet the emergence in the neighbourhood of a state ruled by a Khazar—albeit one baptised three times—obviously did not sit well with the Rus' ruler of Tmutorokan. The memory of Khazaria, that sinister 'wonder of the Jews', the dark kingdom of Kosherishch, was still all too fresh.

As for the father of the enigmatic 'Spheng', the Caucasus had not forgotten him, and the peoples, liberated from the yoke of the slave-owning empire that had hung over them, regarded his campaigns with no small amount of sympathy. Thus, the Armenian Stephanos Asokhik, in the 10th century, asserts that the Rus' of Grand Prince Sviatoslav the Brave came to Danubian Bulgaria not as invaders – as the chroniclers of Eastern Rome, and, following in their footsteps, our 'objective' historians – but as allies and defenders of the Bulgarians against the Byzantine conquerors.

Once again, foreign chroniclers prove to be more fair and respectful towards our ancestors than their descendants. Than we are.

Chapter 5
The Derbent Epic of Emir Maimun and his Russian retinue

Back in Derbent. The emir's misfortune begins with his name. A synonym for democracy. The Shirvanshah's intrigue. Democracy triumphs. A mysterious letter. The Rus come to the rescue. The fall of democracy. Shirvan bets on fanaticism. Besieged in his own city. Emir Maimun's choice. A grateful comrade-in-arms. The return.

We are promised paradise in this world with the houris, And cups brimming with crimson wine.
To flee from beauties and wine in this world
It is wise , if to them we all all come to them equally?

Instead of gold, pearls and amber, we'll choose a different kind of wealth for ourselves.
Cast off your finery, cover your body with rags —
But and in rags rags – remain a king.

Omar Khayyam, 11th century

Returning to Berdaa, we, dear reader, also return to Derbent, to its ancient double wall, which guards the Iron Gates of the Caucasus. In the 80s of the 10th century, the ancient city was ruled by Emir Maimun ibn Ahmad ibn Abd al-Malik. This ruler, a man who was in many ways honourable and brave, was not particularly fortunate throughout his life. It began, one might say, with his very name – I do not know who his father Ahmad was, nor

what reasons he gave his unfortunate son the dreadful name Maimun, which in Arabic means… monkey. Given that, for Muslims, the monkey is a symbol of impurity (our very word 'monkey' derives from the Arabic name for the devil, 'abu zin' – father of sin), the choice of name can hardly be called a fortunate one; the man so named was simply destined from birth to quarrel with Muslim theologians and to flout their strict precepts. In particular, Emir Maimun shared the same ill-fated inclination which, according to chronicle tradition, deterred his contemporary, the Great Prince of Kyiv Vladimir Sviatoslavich, Equal to the Apostles, from converting to Islam – and subsequently introducing it throughout Rus'. To put it simply, the ruler of the Iron Gates was fond of a drink. Had he ruled a different Muslim country or at a different time, this generally minor weakness would have been overlooked – the Muslim clergy were adept at turning a blind eye to the shortcomings of their rulers. Just over five centuries after Emir Maimun's reign, the Turkish Sultan Selim II would even be given the nickname 'Mast' – a drunkard – which did not prevent him from ruling his state peacefully for several decades. Of course, the Ottoman Empire was no tiny principality in the north of the Caucasus, and the sixteenth century was not the tenth. Yet even in the tenth century there were rulers who disregarded the Prophet's prohibition on intoxicants. For instance, the Caliph al-Muqtadir, the ruler of the faithful – the very same who sent Ibn Fadlan as an envoy to the land of the Volga Bulgars – was never seen by his contemporaries in a sober state. To make matters worse, Derbent was far too tempting a prize for its neighbours. All these circumstances – the frivolous emir's inclinations, which were reprehensible for a true Muslim, and the all too advantageous geopolitical location of his small state – did not bode well for a carefree reign for the emir with the strange name.

To begin with, he fell out with the leadership of Derbent's urban community, the so-called 'ra'is', offending their piety with his wild behaviour. Like any democracy, in their struggle against the 'tyrant and despot' Maimun, the rais of Derbent were prepared to sell out their own city, so to speak, wholesale and retail. To a historian, democracy and treachery may well seem synonymous – for, say, in Italy during the Punic Wars, Rome's allied cities, ruled by aristocrats, managed to remain faithful

to the oaths of their forefathers, whilst Italy's democracies, on the other hand, were all vying to throw open their gates to Hannibal's African hordes. In Athens, following the extension of civil rights during the Greco-Persian Wars, matters reached the point where the citizens expelled from the city a ruler who had attempted to transfer funds from the entertainment fund to the defence fund. Only Demosthenes succeeded in this – but it was too late; the armies of Philip, the Macedonian highlander, were already laid up against the walls of Athens. In exactly the same way, the 'skinny, eternal men' shamefully surrendered the Lord of Veliky Novgorod to Asian Muscovy. So democracy is always ready to trade away its country – provided there is someone to sell it to. A buyer was found instantly for the strategically important Iron Gates of the Caucasus.

Maimun's southern neighbour, the Shirvanshah – the Muhammad ibn Ahmad familiar to us, the very same who had petitioned Svyatoslav or his governor on behalf of refugees from the Khazar Khaganate, which had been crushed by the Rus' – had his sights set on Maimun's domains. Since the double walls of the 'Iron Gates', erected by the master craftsmen of Khosrow Anushirvan, proved too strong for the army of his principality, Muhammad ibn Ahmad took the course natural to a man of the East: that of cunning intrigue. He generously supported the city elders of Derbent, fuelling their discontent with the dissolute ruler. Whether all the elders knew whose tune they were dancing to is unknown; but the fact that, following the emir's removal from power and the effective transfer of authority to the ra'is of the Shirvanshah, Muhammad was in no hurry to enter the city suggests either that many of the ra'is did not know whose interests they were serving, or that the Shirvanshah distrusted his allies. The emir was under house arrest; the city was governed by the rais; the Shirvanshah, in no hurry to reap the rewards of his intrigue, was, it would appear, attending to some of his own affairs.

Meanwhile, the emir, who had been arrested by the 'democratic' rais, was not wasting any time. He managed to find a way to establish contact with the Rus. Where and when the ruler of Muslim Derbent managed to forge a friendship with the northern pagans remains unclear to this day. It is quite possible that Maimun encountered the newcomers as early as the days of the Khaganate's fall; it is also possible that the emir established ties with his new neighbours only after the Volga had become the 'Russian River'.

The letter – or, more precisely, the message sent by the emir, who had been imprisoned by his own subjects, to his pagan allies – has most likely survived to this day. Here is what the Arab writer Ibn Abi

Ya'qub al-Nadim around 988: 'Rus' writing. A certain person, whose words I can trust, told me that one of the dynasts from Mount Kabk (as we recall, this is how Arab authors refer to the Caucasus. – *O. V.*) sent him to the ruler of the Rus' and remarked on this occasion that they possess a form of writing which is carved into wood. At that, he took out a piece of white wood (some researchers have identified this 'white wood' as birch bark, and the writing itself as the first mention of the famous birch-bark letters. – *O. V.*), which he then handed to me. Carved into it were characters depicting—I do not know—words or individual letters'. Following these words, al-Nadim presents a series of enigmatic symbols that have been a headache for many generations of scholars ever since the St Petersburg academician H. M. Fren published them in 1836. Fren himself confined himself to remarking on the similarity of these inscriptions to… the Sinai inscriptions of the ancient Near East. In 1841, the Danish State Councillor and professor Finn Magnussen attempted to decipher the mysterious inscription using the 'younger futhark', the runic alphabet of the Viking Age, which is hardly surprising, given that our own historians were already loudly proclaiming the 'Norman origins of Russian history' at that time – Scandinavian researchers would have been fools to turn down such a splendid gift. What is most surprising, however, is that, having set about reading Nedim's inscription in runes, the Dane read it as
'slovianin', that is, a Slav. The Danish professor did not explain why a 'Scandinavian' Rus' would have given a Muslim a tag inscribed with 'Slav' – which is a pity. One would like to grasp the logic behind this action – or at least the logic of the scholar's reasoning.

Another Danish scholar, A.J. Schøgren, who worked in Russia, following in his compatriot's footsteps, deciphered the inscription using the very same
'Younger Futhark'. The result was even more striking – now the inscription read 's rus' lud sloven'. The fact that even the Danes realised that 'Russian people' at the end of the 10th century could only have been
'Sloveni', is undoubtedly pleasing and deserves the attention of our 'objective' scholars. But how all this relates to the runic nature of the inscription, and why exactly it was inscribed on a wooden letter from the 'dynast of Mount Kabk' to the 'ruler of the Rus', is, to me personally, dear reader, not at all clear.

An outstanding Russian researcher and opponent of the Norman theory, whose arguments forced many prominent and honest scholars—who were regarded as pillars of the Norman theory, such as M.P. Pogodin – S.A. Gedeonov also failed in his attempt to interpret the enigmatic inscription. He saw in it the Glagolitic form STOSV – that is, the abbreviated 'Svyatoslav'. As we can see, Gedeonov believed that the inscription dates from the time of Sviatoslav, but I personally find it hard to believe that al-Nedim's informant would have kept a piece of wood with incomprehensible scribbles for a whole generation. Moreover, two different forms of the letter 's' were used in a rather peculiar manner: one from the 'square' Glagolitic script of the Croatian Catholics, the other from the 'rounded' Glagolitic script of the Orthodox Bulgarians – not to mention the fact that the symbols reproduced by al-Nedim in Glagolitic resemble little more than the straight and slender Norman runes.

D.I. Prozorovsky and V.I. Talakin put forward the hypothesis that what we have here is pictography, that is, a pictorial script, the successors of which are road signs and all manner of signposts[40] . However plausible this interpretation may be, it nipped any attempt to decipher the inscription in the bud. As Kipling observed in his tale about the first letter, such inscriptions must be sent with someone who knows what they mean; otherwise, harmless beavers might appear to the recipient as a band of robbers, and a man with a broken spear as a man killed by that spear. To put it bluntly
speaking, it is only because we *know* that a very schematic
depiction of a little man walking up a staircase signifies an underpass – yet another example of pictography from our everyday life – that helps us interpret this image correctly. And since those familiar with the contents of the El-Nedim inscription have lain in unmarked graves for over a thousand years, there is no one left to explain this pictogram to us, and we can only speculate fruitlessly about its meaning.

The last serious scholar to tackle the El-Nedim inscription was our contemporary, M.L. Seryakov. He attempted to decipher the inscription using the Indian Brahmi script. According to him, this yielded a very meaningful phrase: 'May the warrior god grant you good fortune'. Everything seems clear, but could a Caucasian ruler really have sent a messenger on

a long and perilous journey merely to wish the unknown
‘ruler of the Rus’ good luck? The resemblance of the Brahmi characters to the symbols in the manuscript by the Arabic author brings to mind, with a sense of sadness,
the ‘decipherments’ of Magnussen, Schögren and Gedeonov. It is highly doubtful that the Slavs possessed a syllabic script, to which Brahmi belongs. In any case, by the time of al-Nidim’s life, a hundred years had already passed since the future Saint Cyril—then known as the priest Constantine, the Orthodox Caesar’s ambassador to Khazaria—had found books written in ‘Rus’ script’ in Chersonesos and, whilst reading them,
‘began to distinguish between vowels and consonants’ – that is to say, the Rus’ writing system was alphabetic, not syllabic. Finally, a literal reading of the Brahmi symbols proposed by M.L. Seryakov would sound like KHADA THAR THAR THAR UDATHA TETTHAR NABHA. The only word here that resembles Slavic speech is ‘udatha’ – indeed, one cannot do without a stroke of luck when attempting to decipher a solitary inscription.

Most serious researchers understand this perfectly well – which is why interest in the El-Nedim inscription has waned considerably. However, alongside serious scholars, there are also enthusiastic amateurs. There are quite a few of them involved in deciphering the ‘Proto-Slavic script’, and two of the most famous have set about unravelling our mystery with unwavering determination: the scandal-ridden G.S. Grinevich, who ‘reads’ literally everything in a ‘Proto-Slavic language’ known only to himself – from the script of pre-Aryan India found in the lost cities of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa (all that remains is to ‘read’ in this way the scripts of the Maya and the Rongorongo of Easter Island; though, perhaps, I’m simply not keeping up with Grinevich’s publications) and right up to… the bookplate of the *contemporary*, serious runologist Anton Platov. The second, slightly more sensible one, is V.A. Chudinov, who confines himself to the territories where the Slavs actually lived – but in return ‘reads’ absolutely any scratches and cracks on stones, clay and wood. He might well have made a decent career for himself if he’d ‘read’ them as Scandinavian runes – our Normanists are so desperate for ‘Scandinavian inscriptions’ on the lands of Rus’! The first schemer extracted the following unpronounceable combination of sounds from El Nedim’s inscription: ‘rav’i and ives (or
‘iver’. – *O. V.*) ‘brothers-in-arms’.” Chudinov quite rightly pointed out that it is entirely unknown who these ‘rav’i’ and ‘ives’ are,

nor why the Caucasian ruler informed the Russian recipient of their brotherhood. He himself ‘read’ the inscription as ‘beroy (? – *O. V.*) and lead the brothers’. Why is the conjunction ‘and’ repeated twice, and what does the word ‘beroy’? – Chudinov chose not to dwell on these questions, but ‘translated’ the inscription as ‘take him and lead him to the brothers’. As for the fact that the last word belongs more to the ‘language’ of the ‘New Russians’ than to that of the ancient Rus’, Chudinov again prefers not to give it a second thought.

In truth, the tenacity with which researchers have attempted to decipher an image of symbols carved into wood—reproduced from memory on paper by a person of a fundamentally different culture and language, and no doubt distorted on more than one occasion during transcription—truly deserves a better use. And how do we know that the inscription does not need to be rotated by 180 degrees to be read correctly? Could it be a seal that requires a mirror image to be understood? Finally, could it be – and this, in my view, is the most likely possibility – a cipher, a set of conventional symbols, upon receiving which the Rus’ ruler was supposed to undertake certain actions agreed in advance between him and the author of the letter? After all, ciphers did not appear overnight. In the 10th century, the German monk Rabanus Maurus mentions four methods by which the Normans encrypted runic inscriptions, whilst the Scandinavian Jón Olavsson, in his *Runology*, expands the list to twenty-four methods – and this is certainly not all; that is the very purpose of ciphers and secret writing: to ensure that one cannot learn everything about them from publicly available books. The Slavic Varangians, contemporaries and neighbours of the Norse Vikings, also faced the need to conceal their thoughts from ill-wishers and undoubtedly solved this problem with no less ingenuity.

As for the Rus’ script in the 10th century, I repeat, it undoubtedly existed. Ibn Fadlan saw an inscription on the grave of a noble Rus’ containing the name of the ‘tsar of the Rus’ (such a method of ‘dating’ graves was known to the Bulgarians, but was completely unknown to the Normans). Al-Masudi mentions a ‘prophecy’ inscribed on a sacrificial stone in a Rus’ sanctuary. I have already mentioned the books seen by Cyril-Constantine in Chersonesos. I have also mentioned the charters of the Grand Princes of Kyiv and the written wills of Rus’ merchants, which are referred to in the treaty between Grand Prince Igor Rurikovich and the Eastern Roman Empire in 944. The Persian Fakhr ad-Din Mubarakshah

Marwarudi states that the Khazars borrowed from the Rus' (!) a script in which one writes from left to right, separating the letters (and this author, like 'The Life of Cyril', speaks of letters, not syllables or symbols!) one from another.

Returning from the general topic of Rus' writing to the 'specific' instance of the letter from the 'ruler of Mount Kabk' to the 'ruler of the Rus', let us note that this could either be a message to the great Svyatoslav or his representatives in the North Caucasus – a voivode, a governor, or a junior prince – a letter from the Shirvanshah Muhammad ibn Ahmad, or a message from the imprisoned emir Maimun to his Rus' allies. I am inclined towards the second option. Firstly, as I have already said, it is very difficult to imagine anyone carefully preserving a small piece of wood bearing incomprehensible marks for several decades. Secondly, the message itself bears more resemblance to a prisoner's cry for help, hastily scratched onto a small piece of wood – which, if necessary, could be easily hidden from the searchers of 'victorious democracy' and its Shirvan patron – than to a document from an official envoy of an independent sovereign to the ruler or commander of the northern invaders. El Nedim's secrecy also supports the second interpretation – he chose to describe his informant, without naming him, as 'someone I can trust'. Clearly, the contents of the letter and the very fact of correspondence between the Caucasian prince and the leader of the northern pagans had not yet 'cooled off', and the intermediary in this correspondence did not feel safe.

To whom did Emir Maimun turn for help? Hardly to the distant Prince of Kyiv – more likely to the ruler of Belaya Vezha on the Don, unknown to us – the former Sarkel or, more likely, 'Sfengo' Svyatoslavich. All the more so as help arrived very quickly. Eighteen ships, their sails fluttering brightly, brought the Rus' to Derbent. Of course, these were not the vast fleets of Oleg the Prophet's or Grand Prince Igor's time, but times had changed, and so too had the Rus' objectives (strictly speaking, these were not quite the same Rus' either – not the nationwide army summoned by the Grand Prince, but rather several bands from a single town). The crew of one of the ships set out to free Emir Maimun from captivity, but encountered unexpectedly fierce resistance from the townspeople (it is even said that the Rus who went ashore were slaughtered to the last man, which, to be frank, is very hard to believe). In any

case, the Rus were forced to retreat. Reader, does it not strike you as strange that the combat effectiveness of ordinary Transcaucasian Muslims should have increased so dramatically since the time of Berdaa? It strikes me as such, and it evidently struck the Rus as well. I strongly suspect that in the city of the Iron Gates, either the soldiers of Shirvanshah Muhammad were bearing the burden of international duty and fraternal aid to the young Derbent democracy, or their fellow countrymen in plain clothes—who were no less well-equipped or trained—were playing the part of 'ordinary Derbent patriots'.

Of course, there are no direct accounts in the sources as to what exactly the Rus thought on the matter. However, there is a description of their actions, and, judging by this description, the line of reasoning of our ancestors was similar to my own. The Rus' ships sailed south along the coast, first capturing and plundering Mashat – a town south of Derbent – and then… on to Shirvan.

After this, the Rus' returned to Derbent and, in a single blow, took the city of the Iron Gates. All the unprecedented martial prowess of the townspeople and the patriotic consciousness of the citizens of this new democracy – which had enabled them not only to repel the onslaught of the Rus' naval landing force, but perhaps even to annihilate it – had somehow vanished; Personally, I, the reader, cannot shake the impression that these very qualities and this sense of duty were, at that very moment, hurrying at full speed – on foot and on horseback – along the dusty Caucasian roads back to their native Shirvan, once again engulfed in flames, to save whatever could still be saved. That was very, very little, we might add, bearing in mind the Rus' way of life – when the forefathers set their minds to a task, they did it thoroughly.

Joking aside, I strongly suspect that by this time both the Shirvans – or, at the very least, the Shirvanshahs – and the Rus regarded one another as blood enemies. After all, this was already the third generation of Shirvanshahs, starting with the ill-fated Ali ibn al-Gaitam, whom the Rus had defeated. And the third generation of the Rus who had fought against the Shirvans. Yet the Rus of that time took blood feuds very seriously; indeed, the people of the Caucasus still take them seriously to this day.

The sources do not say what happened in the city after Emir Maimun was released from captivity and restored to the throne of his ancestors, but it is easy to imagine. Just imagine, dear reader, how you would have felt in the shoes of the good people of glorious Derbent, bearing in mind that they had not merely rebelled against their lawful ruler, but had also destroyed him – well, not you personally, but in your city; who on earth is to say

—those northern shaitans, perhaps?!—an entire detachment of Rus'? Oh, the people of Derbent recalled the tales of their grandfathers and great-grandfathers: of the fiery hurricane that swept across the shores of the Caspian in 912, and of the unwavering resolve and ruthlessness of the Rus' of Berdaa in 944. So – I am deeply convinced – yesterday's citizens of the free city of Derbent, and now the most humble loyal subjects of the sun-faced emir Maimun ibn Ahmad ibn Abd al-Malik, may Allah, the Most Gracious and Most Merciful, prolong the glorious days of the mighty ruler, themselves, with their own hands, dragged the rais out of the secluded corners where they had holed up, prised them away from the poplars and plane trees with hands that had suddenly become, for their age, uncharacteristically tenacious and strong, and hauled them to the main square, at the feet of the victorious emir, under the icy, frenzied stares of the dreadful pagan Rus'.

'It is they, O our most merciful lord! It is they, the vile offspring of jackals, who dared to raise their voices against one as mighty as a lion and a tiger in the thickets! We have always been loyal to you, O most powerful one; have mercy, spare our wretched lives, for the sake of our children, O hawk of the Derbent peaks!'

I would very much like to say that the matter ended there, but… Shirvanshah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Azd was not the sort to simply abandon the idea of capturing the Iron Gates so easily. Having finished tearing at his beard, anointed with precious oils – not only had the plan to capture Derbent collapsed, but his own domains had been plundered by the spawn of Shaitan! – the Shirvanshah calmed down. And he devised a new plan. Having realised that the 'democratic' rais were incapable of even properly selling out their homeland, he decided to place his bets on another force – religious fanaticism.

And soon, in the vicinity of Derbent, a loud, piercing voice rang out – that of a grey-bearded old man with fiery, mad eyes, clad in a black turban and a robe. This was Musa al-Tusi, a frenzied and fanatical preacher from Gilan – a northern Iranian province on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea – who had 'suddenly' found himself in the Derbent region.

Emir Maimun had evidently got carried away, celebrating with his Russian retinue – for no one had ever forbidden them to drink – their victory over the traitorous rais. As for the Rus', they had little understanding of what Islamic fanaticism entailed. Remaining faithful to their own gods and leaving the strangers to their idols, they could not have imagined the extent of madness

a skilled preacher could drive a crowd of Muslims into. And Musa al-Tusi was not merely skilled; he was a magnificent preacher, every bit as formidable as his 20th-century compatriot – the stern Ayatollah Khomeini. By the time the emir came to his senses and realised that things had gone awry, it was already too late to do anything about it. He no longer had any subjects. Musa al-Tuzi was king and god, second only to Allah, in the city of Derbent and its environs, and the madmen, repeating his words, rushed in droves towards the Russian swords, perishing by the dozen, yet did not even consider retreating. The gates of Derbent's city fortress had barely closed against the frenzied cries of 'Allahu Akbar! Hasan, Ali and Hussein!' in which, like a rising tide, the spears and arrows of the Russian militia were swallowed up without a trace. In the 20th century, not even bursts of automatic fire, nor even tanks, could stop the Ayatollah's flock.

For twenty-eight days, the sea of frenzied crowds crashed against the stone walls of the fortress of the rulers of Derbent. And Emir Maimun ibn Ahmad ibn Abd al-Malik realised with horror: a little longer, and he would have neither a militia nor any subjects left. He could have ordered the Rus to exterminate the townspeople, and the harsh northerners might even have managed it. But how many of them would be killed in the process, and over whom would he, Emir Maimun, then rule?

And yet this was *his* city. And *his* people. They had forgotten that now, but he remembered.

Maimun stepped out of the gate to negotiate with Musa. Clad in rags, sprinkling ashes upon his shaven head, he repented on his knees before the impassive preacher and the sullenly silent townspeople, promising to put the past behind him and start a new life – the life of an exemplary Muslim. Moreover, he swore, not a single drop of that accursed potion, rejected by the Prophet, would touch his throat until his dying days!

Musa al-Tuzī, stroking his beard, calmly reminded Emir Maimun of his bodyguards, the ghulams. The strangers must be handed over to the townspeople. Infidels, said the preacher, must choose: either Islam – or death.

Judging by this detail, the Rus' who had come to the aid of the ill-fated emir were not Christians – for they could have bought their way out with the jizya, as we recall – but pagans.

I can just picture, dear reader, what happened after these words from the Persian preacher. The emir, without rising from his knees, looked at him with a

unpleasant look, then a semblance of a smirk flashed across his dark eyes, and Emir Maimun ibn Ahmad ibn Abd al-Malik, rising to his feet and brushing his knees with his left hand, stretched out his right hand towards the preacher's withered face, scorched by the fire of fanaticism, towards his hawk-like nose. The fingers of the emir's right hand were arranged in a strange manner: four were tucked against his palm, whilst the thumb jutted out between the middle and index fingers…

I am, of course, joking, dear reader. Nowhere is such hooliganism on the part of Emir Maimun described. But the fact remains – Emir Maimun refused in the most resolute manner to force his Russian retinue to choose between death and Islam.

Fate presented Emir Maimun with a choice – a choice between betraying his retinue, who had come to his aid during the difficult days of the rais revolt, and having that retinue slaughter his own subjects. The emir chose a third option: he left the city together with his Russian retinue, heading for neighbouring Tabaristan. He could not, of course, have known the words of another merry fellow and bon vivant, Sir Gilbert Keith Chesterton, who was to be born nine centuries later: 'The devil has two hands, and he always offers us a choice, but we must remember that it is impossible to choose correctly between the devil's hands; the right thing to do is to refuse such a choice.' Yet he acted as though he knew those words. Probably simply because he was abundantly endowed with humanity and common sense.

Emir Maimun left the city together with his Russian retinue. Faced with the choice between betraying his friends and betraying his people, who had lost their minds, he chose the homelessness of a vagabond, leaving behind the throne of his ancestors, the palace and the treasures of the treasury. The Rus' understood and held in high regard the Muslim ruler's actions. It certainly never crossed their minds to abandon someone who could no longer lavish them with gold, female slaves and colourful, precious garments; nor did they wish to condemn him to a life as a dependent in a foreign land.

Meanwhile, the troops of the Shirvanshah Muhammad ibn Ahmad entered Derbent. The city, exhausted by three years of turmoil, could not have resisted its new ruler even if it had wanted to. But a few months later, an event took place that simultaneously demonstrated the Rus' people's gratitude to their friend, the emir, and the attitude of Derbent's townspeople towards the conqueror.

A certain Rus from the retinue of the voluntary exile, whose name is recorded as either Balid or Baldu (yes, once again the same headache with Arabic script, compounded by the fact that the *Rus* name was written half a century after the events in *Turkic-speaking* Derbent *by an Arab*, and has come down to us in a *Turkish* translation made in the 17th century by a certain Münnezim-bashi) – researchers have tried to identify him as both Vlad and Volot[41] , just as the Normanists turned the poor fellow into some sort of Balder – arrived in Derbent. Alone. He walked through the city unnoticed by anyone, although all sources, from Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor and Theophylact Simocatta to Ibn Fadlan and Leo the Deacon, state that to the Syrians, Greeks and Arabs, the Rus' and Slavs of the pagan era appeared to be giants. Or perhaps they did see him – and kept quiet? Perhaps it had finally dawned on the rowdy townspeople of the Iron Gates that it is sometimes no bad thing for the people to remain silent? For several years, the people of Derbent took a very active part in the fate of their native city, rallying first behind corrupt democratic rais, then behind the Islamic fanatic Musa al-Tusi. And what did this bring the people of Derbent? Hundreds of fresh graves? Hundreds of widows and orphans? Foreign soldiers on the streets? A splendid outcome to several years of 'freedom' – splendid and entirely predictable. And how many more times is it destined to be repeated! Truly, the main lesson of history is that nobody learns from its lessons.

Having made his way – whether noticed or not – into the ruler's palace, 'Bald' headed for the Shirvanshah. He pushed aside the bodyguards trying to protect their master, caught up with the fleeing conqueror and struck him on the back of the head with an axe. Incidentally, the choice of weapon was hardly a coincidence either. Remember, reader, we spoke of how the Rus' did not use an axe against an equal, worthy opponent – only against a beast whilst hunting or a rebellious serf? The Rus' did not merely strike a blow – he expressed his attitude towards the Eastern despot and schemer, who achieved his ends through the hands of others and fled from open combat. After that, he turned and left Derbent. No one was able – or perhaps unwilling? – to prevent him from leaving. The Shirvans took the wounded ruler (surely a steel helmet was hidden beneath the turban of the Shirvanshah Muhammad ibn Ahmad, since he had been merely *wounded* by an axe blow to the head!) back to his native Shirvan, and his troops followed him. Soon, Emir Maimun returned to Derbent. He returned quietly to the palace of his ancestors and quietly met

the former ruler of Derbent. The city and its ruler, by mutual silent agreement, pretended that nothing had happened. Two years later, the schemer Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Azdi passed away: bearing in mind that he had previously acted as a mediator between Svyatoslav (or his men) and the fugitive Khazars, it is clear that the ruler of Shirvan was a very old man; and, after all, blows from an axe to the head—even one protected by a helmet—do no one any favours. He made no further attempts on Derbent—no doubt the grey-bearded ruler's scar on the back of his head began to itch at the very sight of the North. And Emir Maimun ibn Ahmad ibn Abd al-Malik ended his reign in peace and, perhaps, managed to hear the first rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, which he would surely have liked – a man who sincerely loved worldly pleasures, yet had seen enough in life to occasionally reflect on their transience.

Rusov was not by his side. He had not been there even when he rode through the Iron Gate and the guards, wearing turbans over their pointed helmets, bowed their heads before him, as though the last five years had simply never happened. They, too, had returned. Their home was ablaze, their land was calling forth the faithful children of its gods, and the waves were washing ashore idols that had floated down the rivers from the North, defaced by a sacrilegious axe. They had returned. And for a very long time, the Caucasus Mountains heard neither the clang of Russian weapons nor the footsteps of Russian warriors. It was not until half a thousand years later, in the rapidly approaching age of gunpowder, that the first bands of Ushkuyniks and Cossacks began to appear here. And it would take another four centuries for warriors to follow in the bandits' wake and for Rus' to return to its Caucasian frontier.

Conclusion
‘Their faith blunted their swords’

How the ‘respect’ the baptised Rus’ by the ‘brothers’. The Pecheneg scourge. The price of the new faith. ‘The lands unknown lands’. The Caucasian frontier – a thousand years on.

And when the soldiers return home —
Ruins where once stood their palaces,
In terrible wrath, tears will be shed Upon
the curse of all enemies!

So it was in the kingdoms and states That
stood at the ends of the earth:
They burnt others’ nests for
amusement, Yet failed to preserve
their own!

Nikola Emelin, ‘The Tsar’s Amusements’

Stories circulate from book to book about how, with its conversion to Christianity, Rus’ supposedly joined the ranks of cultured and civilised nations. About how, following this conversion, neighbouring Christian countries and peoples supposedly came to regard Rus’ and the Rus’ people not as barbarians, but as their equals. To be honest, it cannot be said that pagan Rus’ was viewed without respect – the German Raffelshtetten Trade Charter of 904 contains no mention of any discrimination against Rus’ merchants. The Arabs, as we have seen, write of pagan Rus’ with no small amount of respect. The rulers of the Rus’ are referred to throughout the world as kings, tsars, or even ‘khakans’ – emperors.

So, surely, after the baptism, this respect must have grown?

But here is what Michael Psellos wrote in the mid-11th century: ‘This barbarian tribe is constantly seething with malice and hatred towards the Roman Empire and, ceaselessly concocting one pretext after another, seeks a reason to wage war against us’ (Chronographia, Zoe and Theodora…, XCI). And this is written by an Orthodox Byzantine, whom Christ himself would have commanded to respect his brothers in the faith! Half a century has already passed since the Slavs dragged the golden-bearded idol of the God of Victory through the streets of Kyiv, through the mud and horse-dung—the very name by which their fathers and grandfathers had taken Berdaa, Itil, Sarkel, and laid siege to Tsargrad. And what of it?

‘A barbarian tribe’.

In the Byzantine territories of southern Italy, in the ancient cathedral of Torricello—built by Byzantine architects in the 12th century—on a fresco depicting the Last Judgement, beneath the feet of Satan seated on his throne, women’s heads with braids protrude from the ‘lake of fire and brimstone’, whilst men’s heads – with moustaches and tufts of hair on their shaven heads – also protrude. Many centuries have passed since the baptism of Rus’, yet in the eyes of the Byzantine ‘brothers’ – Torricello, incidentally, stands on lands which the Byzantines defended against the Sicilian Normans and Moors only thanks to the military detachments sent by the Orthodox Russian princes – the accursed ‘people of Rus’ remained a demonic brood, whose place is only in the underworld.

But why be surprised? Let us recall how, a century after the baptism of Bulgaria by Prince Boris, the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, Nikephoros Phokas, railed against the Bulgarian envoys, calling them a filthy, wretched and base tribe in every respect, and their Orthodox tsar, Peter Sursuvul, a ‘barbarian who wraps himself in animal skins and gnaws on raw hides’.

A profound lack of respect, is it not, reader?

Perhaps Western Christians have come to respect us? Yes… At the very least, Byzantium was powerless to launch active attacks on Rus’ – the dying empire no longer possessed the strength it once had. And our Western ‘brothers in faith’ simply paid us regular ‘fraternal’ visits, showing their respect for their newfound brothers in Christ – Poles, Magyars, Swedes, Teutons, and Poles again… Thitmar of Merseburg remarks with disdain: Vladimir, he says, having embraced Christianity, did not do it justice. ‘The Rus’ are such Christians that their Christianity makes the devil himself feel sick,’ one of the Teutonic Crusader brothers would later remark.

And the Arab historian Marwazi, like Thitmar, a younger contemporary of the baptism of Rus', having described the former customs and traditions of the Rus', those very same Rus' who once swept across the Caspian like a fiery whirlwind, spent a year in Berdaa, scattering the Muslim hordes approaching the city—those to whom the Sanarians and the Emir of Derbent, Maimun, had appealed for protection—concludes: 'When they converted to Christianity, their faith blunted their swords; the doors to plunder closed before them, and they returned to want and poverty; their means of subsistence dwindled.'

Oh, of course, it is easy to say that the Arab is mistaking his wishes for reality. Yet everything we know about this era confirms not the fairy tales in our school textbooks about the supposedly unprecedented rise of Russian culture and statehood following the baptism, but precisely Marvazi's sombre account.

The chronicle states that after the baptism there was 'ceaseless warfare with the Pechenegs'. To counter the Pechenegs, Vladimir the Baptist erected fortresses on the Sula, Stugna, Ostra, Trubezh and Desna rivers – even on the Desna, on which Chernihiv stood! And for this, people never tire of singing his praises as the great defender of the Russian lands, as if having forgotten that even his grandfather, the Grand Prince of Kyiv, Igor Rurikovich, had himself ventured into the Pecheneg steppe and could, in the words of the chronicle, 'command' the Pechenegs to attack any country he wished. The late Boris Alexandrovich Rybakov 'explained' that it is not

Grand Prince Svyatoslav Igorevich, but his son[42] , arguing that, he says, all too often during Svyatoslav Igorevich's reign, Kyiv saw Pecheneg hordes encamped beneath its walls – oh, very often indeed, a whole single time! And then the Pechenegs fled headlong, the moment they even thought that the fearsome Prince Svyatoslav was approaching the besieged city. But under his son, the submissive vassals of Igor and Svyatoslav—that

'the blade in the hands of the Rus', which they 'turn wherever they please' – remember Ibn Hawqal? – are certainly not wintering beneath the capital of Rus'.

Just consider the story of Kozhemyaka alone. It is quoted so often – yet not a single one of those quoting it has stopped to think about what is actually happening! The Pechenegs are stationed at Trubezh – that is sixty kilometres from the outskirts of Kyiv, a day's journey even on foot, and for a mounted horde of nomads – merely a few hours' ride at a moderate pace!

The prince seems to be here – yet the raiders have no intention of fleeing; on the contrary, their leader himself demands a meeting with the ruler of the Rus'. And he shouts across the river, baring his yellow wolf-like teeth with a sneer: 'Let's put our fighters forward – I'll field mine, and you field yours. Let them fight; if ours wins, we'll plunder Rus' for three years; if yours wins, we'll leave!' This steppe warrior, truth be told, outdoes even Shamil Basayev in audacity – the latter, as I recall, was rude to the face not of the ruler of Russia, but 'merely' the prime minister, the head of government. The unruly vassals of the new prince's ancestors do not hold him in particularly high regard. Then again, why should they respect him? The most striking example of his military valour in the chronicles describes how he hid *under a bridge* to escape the victorious Pechenegs. Can one imagine Oleg the Prophet, Igor the Old, or Svyatoslav the Brave in his place? And can one imagine any of their close associates – Asmund, Sveneld, or Volk – in Dobrynya's place, cautiously advising the sovereign not to get involved with a tribe that is too rich and powerful, and to seek out harmless 'lapotniks' as prey? And yet it is not merely a close adviser to the sovereign who speaks – it is his uncle, his mother's brother, his tutor! So why on earth should his charge be respected?

And Vladimir – as if to prove to the nomadic chieftain that he, the ruler of the Rus' who until recently were a formidable force, is truly not worthy of respect – agrees to the Pecheneg's terms. And yet, in his entire army, there is no one more capable in battle than a leatherworker. Thanks to him, the enemy was defeated and Rus' was defended… but what if he had failed?

In fact, all the chronicler's accounts of victories over the Pechenegs at this time are imbued with a sense of amazement at these triumphs – could they really have done it? The Pechenegs, whom Igor once commanded, who fled at the mere mention of Svyatoslav's name, can only be defeated by Vladimir *through a miracle* – so it reads between the lines of the chronicle. It is not the valour of the druzhina, nor the prince's courage and wisdom – it is the physical strength of a young man from the posad and the cunning of a frail old townsman that now stand against the enemies of Rus'.

Why, then, does the chronicler not believe in the strength of his people? It seems to me, reader, that it is because he knows just how severely that strength has been undermined. Here are the stark archaeological statistics: at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries, archaeologists noted the disappearance of 28.9 per cent of the Old Russian settlements known to them. This alarming figure ought to occupy

no less than the notorious twenty million – yet it is not even known. So please forgive me, reader – I intend to repeat it from book to book until everyone who needs to know has learnt and remembered it. And one can repeat as many incantations as one likes about 'strengthening statehood' and 'subduing' some 'tribes' that have appeared out of nowhere. History recognises only one significant event of that time – the baptism of Rus'. When, in the words of one – and I emphasise this to avoid accusations of 'parroting the old Soviet atheist propaganda' – pre-revolutionary ecclesiastical author, the Orthodox 'Church established the Cross of Christ upon corpses'. The contemporary Russian scholar I.Y. Froyanov expresses a similar view: 'Chroniclers – people who, as a rule, were of the clergy – tried not to speak of the dark sides of the Christianisation of Rus'; and there were few bright ones (…) Christianity began its journey in the lands conquered by Kyiv, splattered with blood'. You, the reader, can imagine the scale of this 'splashing' from the figure given. This is described, rather, not 'splattered with blood' but 'knee-deep in blood'! Moreover, even in the towns that survived this terrible period, massacres took place – take, for instance, the story of Novgorod, where 'Dobrynya baptised with fire, and Putyata with the sword', to quote the famous phrase from the Ioakim Chronicle, now confirmed by archaeological excavations. Or the chilling legend preserved in the town of Turov – of crosses that floated into the town on a river of blood, instead of the water that had flooded the Pripyat.

So is it any wonder that a country bled dry by a monstrous civil war waged in the name of a foreign god found itself powerless to resist the nomads? Al-Masudi referred to the Don as the 'Russian River', whilst Ibn Hawqal called the Volga by that name. Yet Vladimir established fortified outposts on the Desna and the Trubezh. Is it any wonder, then, that his druzhina was weak? Executioners who slaughtered their own brothers out of 'lofty ideological considerations' have never, anywhere, been good warriors.

Two centuries later, Prince Igor Svyatoslavich of Novgorod-Seversky, as if repeating the ancient feat of his great namesake, would set out into the steppe to wage war against the nomads. No, I am not referring to the fact that he suffered defeat. It is simply… simply the enigmatic Div, calling out from the top of the tree
'to unknown lands', announces amongst them the approach of 'Igor's valiant host' to the Volga, the Pomor region – the Black Sea coast, evidently –

Posulye, Surozh, Korsun, Tmutorokan. I find it hard, reader, to shake off the impression that the unknown author of *The Tale*, who has not forgotten the pagan gods and seems to have neglected to mention Christ even once, or any of the saints, and who has openly declared his disbelief in the resurrection of the dead ('Igor's glorious host shall not be resurrected'), deliberately, with a bitter smile, lists as 'unknown' those lands where the Rus' dwelt before their baptism. Surozh, to which Prince Bravlin travelled. The Volga, along which Grand Prince Svyatoslav led his armies,
the 'Russian River' of Ibn Hawqal. Korsun, where Cyril saw books written in 'Rus' script'. Tmutorokan, where the pagan 'Sfengo' resided, from whence the Rus' avengers, unknown to us, set out on their dreadful campaign of 912. He never once explicitly expresses his attitude towards Christ and Christianity – he is far too cautious for that. He merely lists the lands 'unknown' to his baptised great-grandchildren, which had once been familiar hunting grounds, or even the home of their pagan forefathers…

And furthermore – now without any ulterior motive – lovingly, almost tenderly –
'Olgov's valiant nest slumbers in the field; *how far it* has strayed!' Far away… and yet 'Igor is still leading his warriors to the Don'! What of the Caucasus, when the Rus' feel as though they have journeyed into an unimaginable distance, having not yet reached the borders of Rus' under another Igor – Igor the Old, Igor the Great, Igor the pagan.

And yet this land – that vast expanse to the south and east of the notorious towns of Vladimir, stretching all the way to the Ciscaucasia – has not simply been abandoned, cast into a desolate and lifeless foreign world. It remained here, right on our doorstep – but from Russian land it became the Wild Field, Desht-i-Kipchak, the Polovtsian steppe. Fifty major – and I mean major – raids over a hundred and fifty years! Every third year, these lands—which had once been Russian under the pagan princes but had now become a lair for marauding nomadic beasts—spewed forth screeching and howling hordes; log cabins went up in flames, the fields were trampled beneath the unshoed hooves of steppe ponies, and the convicts, dragging their steppe burdens along on a rope, would whisper to one another through their tears: 'I *was* from this town… and I – from that village.' Every third year!

And how many 'minor' raids were there – as if there were such a thing as a minor death, a minor captivity…

That, too, weighs on *his* conscience. Not just the brother lured into a vile trap and put to the sword by mercenaries. Not just his betrothed, who was raped. Not just the inhabitants of 28.9 per cent – *A THIRD*! – of Russian towns and villages who refused to renounce their gods.

But also these convicts, and the serf, with his face buried in the field watered by his own blood, whilst the nomad unhitches the horse from the plough, and the warriors who fell in fierce battles, and the Russian children whom the golden-haired girl, dragged away from her native village on a rope, will never bear – all of them!

And the lives of his father's and grandfather's comrades-in-arms, who fell amongst the steppe feathergrasses, who plunged into the red waters of the Don or the Volga – all so that none of this might ever have happened!

Are there any words, is there any curse for the one guilty of making their deaths in vain?

A traitor to his native gods – truly, there is nothing more to say.

But have we not seen something similar recently? Have we not seen how a victory bought with the blood of Russian lads is handed over to their murderers? And a couple of months later, the
'civilians' let their beards grow, dig up the automatic rifles buried in the ravines – and it all begins anew – everything except the lives of our lads, sacrificed to ensure that this would not happen.

Just like that, unexpectedly and terrifyingly, events from a thousand years ago echo the present day. And Russian lads in camouflage find themselves in the same ranks as Yermolov's soldiers and Cossacks, as Voivode Sveneld's militia, and as the Slavic warriors who laid siege to Partava and perished beneath the green blades of Mervan the Merciless's horsemen. And standing against them in the same ranks are Mervan himself, Buga the Elder, the Shirvanshahs Ali and Muhammad, Imam Shamil, and the child-murderers of Budennovsk, Volgodonsk, Beslan, the Basayevs, the Raduyevs, the Khatabys – all overshadowed by the green banner brought to the Caucasus Mountains from the scorching sands of Arabia. And behind those who stand in the way of the child-murderers, carrying out the work of their forefathers, the empty eye sockets of Kagan Obadiah and the Kiev apostate and fratricide Vladimir peer out from beneath the lacquered visors of venal armchair generals and from behind the dull lenses of the spectacles worn by hypocritical 'human rights' activists, biding their time for the strike. And, just as a thousand years ago, some bring – from

the north – to the Caucasian frontier – order and law for all (‘It is our duty to rule you well; it is your duty to obey us well’), others – from the south – lawlessness, the right of the strong for the ‘true believers’ and the lack of rights for the ‘infidels’, for whom the only right is to stay alive, pay the jizya and meekly endure any abuse at the hands of the ‘true believers’.

So, will it all happen again? Another row of futile graves? And once more retreat, hide away in a hole, allowing those who trembled before our ancestors to run rampant on our land?

I do not know. It seems to me that much depends on us. Will we prove worthy of our ancestors, before whom empires trembled and crumbled to dust, whose name resounded like the thunder of heaven – or will we once again allow yet another foreign ‘faith’, this time in ‘universal human values’, to blunt the blades of our souls?

But of one thing I am firmly convinced – soldiers’ graves are never in vain. I do not know who wrote the ‘Book of Veles’ or when. But whoever he was, whenever he lived – it contains words dictated by the gods:

‘RUSICHI! DO NOT TRUST YOUR ENEMIES. WHERE RUSSIAN BLOOD HAS BEEN SPILLED, THERE LIES RUSSIAN LAND’.

The Caucasian frontier is consecrated for all eternity by the holy blood of Russian warriors and Russian soldiers.

Chronicle of the Slavs in the Caucasus

627 – Moses Kagantakavatsi hears the Slavic language spoken by the warriors of the Khazar khagan besieging Partava.

644 – Shahriyar, the ruler of Derbent, mentions in a letter to an Arab ruler the Rus' and Khazars, whom he refuses to allow into Transcaucasia.

730 – The forces of the Arab commander Jarrah, whose ranks included 'Sakaliba' Slavs, are defeated by the Khazars at the Battle of Ardabil.

737 – The Arab commander Mervan ibn Muhammad, known as 'the Merciless', during the war with the Khazars, breaks through to the 'river of the Slavs' (the Don) and takes 20,000 Slavic families captive, resettling them in Kakheti.

789–820 – The Jewish reforms of Kagan-bek Obadiah and the ensuing civil war. The establishment of a Jewish regime in the Khaganate.

The 840s – Ibn Khordadbeh, a customs official of the Caliphate, describes Russian merchants arriving in Baghdad from the Caspian Sea.

910 – The Shirvanshah's fleet massacres the Rus' merchants.

912 – The Rus' invade the shores of the Caspian Sea. On their return with their spoils, the Rus' are wiped out by the Khazar Muslims.

944–945 – The Rus' captured the city of Berdaa and held it for a year, showing phenomenal tolerance towards the local inhabitants and consistently defeating the Muslim hordes that approached Berdaa.

965–966 – Sviatoslav's campaign against the Khazars, the Yases and the Kasogs. 986–988 – the epic tale of the Emir of Derbent, Maimun, and his Rus'
retinue.

Appendix I
The physical appearance of Prince Svyatoslav Igorevich as an ethno-defining characteristic

The 1060th anniversary of the Russian Hero

Introduction

For centuries, scholars have debated the ethnic identity of the Rus' tribe ('Rus' in the chronicles, 'Russians' in Greek sources, 'Ar-Rus' in Arabic sources, etc.), who united the Slavs and a number of non-Slavic tribes of Eastern Europe under their rule and founded the Rus' state.

Recently, this question has been addressed from a purely linguistic, or even purely onomastic, perspective (1). The main argument in determining the origin of the Rus' is the etymology of the word 'Rus', the names of the envoys of the 'Rus' tribe' in 10th-century treaties with Byzantium, and the 'Rus' names for the rapids mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenitus. At the same time, a vast body of information on the culture, way of life and customs of the Rus', contained in the sources, is overlooked. In particular, descriptions of the physical appearance and 'hairstyles' of the Rus', the most striking of which is the description of the appearance of Grand Prince Svyatoslav Igorevich by Leo the Deacon (Book 9, Chapter 11):

'This was his appearance: of moderate height, neither too tall nor too short, with bushy eyebrows and light eyes, a snub nose, beardless, with thick, excessively long hair above his upper lip. His head was completely bald, with a tuft of hair hanging down on one side – a sign of nobility' (2).

This description is extremely valuable to us in that it is the only detailed account of the appearance of a noble Rus' man of that era, written by a contemporary either under the direct impression of the subject or based on an eyewitness account.

A number of questions arise: firstly, can a hairstyle serve as an indicator of ethnic origin; secondly, to what extent was this style characteristic of the Rus' people of the 9th–11th centuries; thirdly, given that the prevailing theory is that the Rus' people were of Scandinavian origin, how can these descriptions be reconciled with Scandinavian customs; and fourthly, since, as we shall see below, this hairstyle is associated with Turkic influence, to what extent does it correspond to Turkic traditions? Finally, what were the Slavic customs in this area of daily life, and to what extent did they differ from those of the Rus'? By resolving these questions, we will be able to assess

the appearance of Grand Prince Svyatoslav Igorevich in particular and the Rus' in general, as an ethno-defining characteristic, which will assist in resolving the issue of the Rus' ethnic affiliation by means that appear to be more reliable than onomastic ones.

Chapter 1
Hairstyle as a marker of identity

In the Middle Ages, just as in antiquity and in traditional societies in general, the question of appearance—in particular, hairstyles—was by no means a matter of fashion or personal choice. As a rule, a person's appearance was determined by their affiliation—ethnic, religious or social (during the pagan period, these factors might have been intertwined; or, to be more precise, had not yet been separated). Thus, late Roman authors note that it was precisely their hairstyles that distinguished the Alans from the Scythians – specifically, hair cut in a circle rather than long, shoulder-length hair (3). The Bible contains a prohibition against Jews cutting their beards or shaving their heads, 'for you are the sons of the Lord your God' (Deut. 14:1–2. See also Lev. 19:27–28, 21:1–6). In Sparta, the duties of a Spartan man—that is, a full citizen—equally included 'attending the sisitia, shaving one's moustache, and obeying the laws' (4).

The most intriguing example is the history of hairstyles in Byzantium. In the 4th–6th centuries, most subjects and the emperor himself kept their faces clean-shaven; beards and moustaches were a sign of being a 'Hellene', that is, a pagan (5). In contrast, the iconography of the 7th–9th centuries shows virtually no beardless emperors; their subjects are also depicted with beards and moustaches (hair was generally cut no higher than the ears. However, there were exceptions – see below). The fact is that these periods are separated by the era of iconoclasm. Depictions of Christ with the virginal, pure face of an angel or eunuch (Christ the Good Shepherd, Christ Diogenes, etc.) (6) were for the most part destroyed and, once the iconoclastic period ended, were replaced by icons from the Middle Eastern, Syrian school, where Christ was depicted with a beard and moustache. And medieval Christians, who held the words of the Bible concerning 'in the image and likeness' (Genesis 1:26) in high regard and took their cue from the new icons, began to grow beards and moustaches.

Thus, the image of the Deity or the conception of Him served as a guide regarding one's appearance and hairstyle, which is only natural for the actions of a traditional or religious person:

'A religious person… realises that they are a true human being only to

the extent to which he resembles the gods, the heroic founders of civilisations, and mythical ancestors… By re-enacting their myths, religious people seek to draw closer to the gods and become part of Being' (7).

This interconnection is of considerable importance to our topic. Firstly, we have established that, in their hairstyles, traditional people sought to emulate the gods and their ancestors. Since, at the pagan level, religious and ethnic identities are indistinguishable – see the treaty of 912:
'Rusyn or Christian' (8) – hairstyles become a fairly reliable marker of ethnicity.

Secondly, depictions and descriptions of pagan gods are therefore a reliable source regarding the customs of the peoples who worshipped them.

Chapter 2: The Customs of the Rus'

It should perhaps be noted straight away that Sviatoslav was no exception amongst the Rus'. Leo the Deacon states explicitly that, in appearance, the prince 'did not differ in any way' from his courtiers. The only hint of distinction one might recall is a solitary 'lock of hair – a sign of noble birth'. Consequently, the other Rus' were beardless and had their heads shaved.

Arab authors, when describing the Rus', rarely mention their hairstyles. There are two explanations for this: firstly, removing one's headgear outside the home was contrary to the customs of the Rus'. The expression 'to go bareheaded' has retained its disapproving connotation to this day. Eleventh-century Rus' princes even stood with their heads covered in church (!) (9). Secondly, to shaven-headed Muslims, the shaven heads of the Rus' may have seemed something ordinary, self-evident and unworthy of mention. However, Ibn Hawqal reports positively on the Rus' practice of shaving their heads (10). From him, as well as from al-Idrisi and Dimashqi, we learn that some of the Rus' shaved their beards, whilst others let them grow, curling them 'like a mane', or dyeing them with saffron (11). It is worth noting that, in the accounts of Arab authors, those with beards invariably follow those who shave: perhaps because the latter constituted the majority among the Rus'.

The Frankish chronicler Ademar of Chabans writes of the Rus' at the turn of the 10th–
11th centuries: '… a certain Greek bishop came to Russia… and compelled them to adopt the Greek custom regarding the growing of beards and everything else' (12). From this it is clear that 'growing a beard' for the Rus' of the 10th century was a 'Greek custom' that arrived alongside Christianity. Prior to that, the Rus' evidently shaved.

Portraits of Rus' princes from the 10th–11th centuries have survived – on the coins of Vladimir I, son of Sviatoslav, and his grandson Sviatopolk I (13). A seal of Yaroslav the Wise bearing a portrait of the prince has been found in Novgorod (14). A bas-relief has survived in which, according to scholars' assumptions, he is depicted in the guise of his heavenly patron,

St Demetrius of Thessaloniki (15). His brother Sviatoslav is depicted in a miniature in the collection of texts bearing his name (16).

It is impossible to make out his hairstyle on the coins, but one thing is clear – it is not long hair (that the coin-makers were capable of depicting long hair becomes evident when one turns over Vladimir's zlatnik, on the reverse of which Christ is depicted with long hair and a beard). No hair protrudes from beneath the crown or cap. There is no beard either; only a long moustache is visible, framing a bare, round chin.

Yaroslav Vladimirovich's appearance is striking. On the seal, we see a figure that differs greatly from Gerasimov's reconstruction – before us is a typical European knight of the 10th–11th centuries, wearing a conical helmet with a visor, from beneath which long moustaches protrude to the sides. There is no beard, and no hair is visible from beneath the helmet.

On the Kyiv bas-relief, we see a Byzantine-style hairstyle – hair parted down the middle with curls at ear level. Whether this hairstyle belongs to the real prince or to the iconographic canon of St Demetrius is entirely unclear. One feature can safely be recognised as a portraitistic trait of Izyaslav – a clean-shaven chin and a moustache curving downwards. The Byzantines of that era did not shave their beards!

Finally, in Sviatoslav's Izbornik we see that neither the prince's hair nor that of his five sons is visible from beneath their caps, which leave the ears exposed. The princes' faces are clean-shaven. The prince's chin is covered with stubble (but not a beard!). Beneath his nose is a small, thick moustache curving downwards.

It is worth adding a description to these illustrations. In the 'Tale of Boris and Gleb', believed to have been composed in the 11th century, we find a description of the eldest of the martyr brothers: 'He was handsome in build, tall, with a round face, broad shoulders, a slender waist, kind eyes, a cheerful countenance, young in age, and *his moustache* was still young' (17). This description, which most likely stems from the recollections of an eyewitness, mentions the prince's moustache but says nothing about a beard or his hair, in contrast to later icons, which were painted under the influence of Byzantine fashions and iconographic canons.

Thus, having reviewed the material at our disposal, we can state with confidence that Prince Svyatoslav Igorevich's appearance was by no means a personal whim of his. The Rus' of the 9th–11th centuries shaved their beards, and until the 11th century, their heads as well. Subsequently, they may have kept their hair cut short.

Since Normanists have claimed and continue to claim that the Rus' were Scandinavians, the next stage of our research should be to examine Scandinavian customs regarding hairstyles, as well as what the Scandinavian tradition says about shaving the head and beard.

Chapter 3
Scandinavian Customs

Here what he rightly recognised leading 'anti-Normanist' of the 19th century, S. Gedeonov, in his seminal work *The Varangians and Rus'*:

'Long hair was (among the Germanic peoples and Scandinavians – *L. P.*) a distinguishing mark of a free man, whilst a shaved head was the mark of a slave. Germanic pagans swore by their hair and beards (Vodanova). The Norse Odin was known as 'Long-bearded', and Thor as 'Red-bearded'. Shaving off one's beard was regarded by the Germanic peoples as the ultimate dishonour' (18).

But Gedeonov is an 'anti-Normanist'. Perhaps he is mistaken, or is he deliberately distorting the facts?

As already noted, people of traditional cultures sought to emulate their gods in appearance. The 'Hellenes' of Justinian's time grew beards not in order to distinguish themselves from Christians (which would have been dangerous), but to emulate Zeus-Jupiter, Serapis and the like.

One man did indeed bear the name Harbard – 'Long (or Grey) Beard' – amongst his nicknames and names. He refers to himself by this name, amongst others, in the Eddic 'Song of Grimnir', and appears under this name in a specific song of the same name in the Poetic Edda (19). In the play in honour of Haakon the Good, Guttorm Sindri refers to a shield as 'Harbard's shield' (20). There are depictions of Odin with long hair and a beard (21).

Depictions of Thor with a beard have also survived (22). In the saga of Eirik the Red, Thorhall the Hunter says:

'Well then, did not Redbeard prove stronger than your Christ?' – referring specifically to Thor (23).

The third most powerful of the Norse gods, Freyr, is scarcely mentioned in Eddic poetry, and his epithets contain no reference to a beard; yet the idols of this god are depicted with a long, pointed beard (24).

The faithful were not to be outdone by their gods. There are simply too many instances of beards being mentioned in the sagas to count. Just look at these epithets: Björn Blue-Toothed-Bearded, Broddi the Bearded, Bjalvi the Bearded, Gnup the Bearded, Grim Shaggy-Cheeks, Sigtþrogg Silk-Bearded, Torvald Curly-Bearded, Torvald Blue-Bearded, Torgeir Waist-Length-Bearded, Tord the Bearded, Thorolv the Bearded (25), Nicholas the Bearded, Svein the Fork-Bearded, Thórir the Bearded, Thórir the Wooden-Bearded, Thorolv the Lousy-Bearded, Harald the Golden-Bearded, Harald the Red-Bearded (26).

Nicknames referring to hair colour (Red, White, Black, Golden), its beauty (Fair-haired) or the unfortunate consequences of poor grooming (Harald the Shaggy, Kalv the Dandruff) are also common. The ideal hero of the Scandinavian epic, Sigurd-Siegfried, 'had hair… that was dark blond and beautiful to look at, falling in long waves. His beard was thick, short, and of the same colour' (27). One of the Jomsvikings, sentenced to execution, asks someone to hold his hair so that the axe does not touch it and it is not splattered with blood (28). And those around him take this for granted! The Russian proverb 'Once the head is off, no one weeps for the hair' would hardly be understood here. Instead, there is a collection of proverbs noted by Dal in his compendium with the annotation (schismatic): 'Cut off our heads, but leave our beards alone', 'Without a beard, they won't let you into paradise', 'The image of God is in the beard, and the likeness in the moustache' (29) – the Normans, it would seem, would have understood these perfectly well, except that by 'God' they would have meant Odin rather than the Orthodox Saviour.

It should be specifically emphasised that the proverbs cited here are schismatic, Old Believer in origin; that is to say, firstly, they are relatively late in origin; secondly, they do not reflect the views and customs of the entire Eastern Slavic population; and thirdly, once again, are conditioned by religion—and, moreover, by a foreign, imported religion.

How did the Scandinavians regard people without hair or beards? The 'Song of Audun of the Western Fjords', in describing the eponymous hero returning from a pilgrimage to Rome, lists the signs of his dire straits: 'A terrible illness befell him. He wasted away terribly. He had spent all his money… He began to beg for food.' It seems one could hardly imagine a worse fate for a proud Norse man, but the storyteller concludes the description with a detail intended to emphasise the full extent of Audun's downfall: 'His head *is shaven* and his appearance

rather pitiable' (30). It is noteworthy that, in this state, Audun 'dares not show himself to the konung'. The story is set in the 11th century.

In the saga of the burning of Njal and his sons, the title character is noted with deep regret, as if it were a lamentable physical flaw in a worthy and honourable man: 'but he had no beard'
(31). Hallgerð, who hates Njal—she and she alone—calls him beardless: 'You and Njal are a fine match for one another—you have ingrown nails, and he is beardless', 'Who, then, will avenge us? Isn't he the beardless one?', 'Why doesn't he smear manure on his chin to be LIKE ALL MEN (my emphasis – *L. P.*)?', 'We call him "beardless", and his sons "manure-bearded"' (32). Njal's sons respond to these insults by murdering Hallgerð's kinsman. The saga is set in the second half of the 10th century.

Thus, a shaved head was a sign of complete downfall and destitution, humiliating and shameful, whilst 'beardless' – along with 'manure-bearded' – was a deadly insult to the Scandinavians of the 10th–11th centuries.

It should be noted straight away that we have very little information about the hairstyling customs of the Swedes, with whom Norse scholars usually identify the Rus'. The only evidence is the depictions on the Korsun Gates of Novgorod's St Sophia Cathedral, which were brought from Sigtuna, where we see either bearded men with hair covering their ears, or clean-shaven youths with their hair plaited, or, finally, clean-shaven clergy of the Catholic Church (33). Furthermore, in one Swedish ballad, the hero defeats his opponent by seizing him by the beard (34).

Furthermore, in Sweden, Odin, Thor and Freyr were revered as supreme gods (35), and consequently, their appearance was emulated. Secondly, the cult of hair was not only pan-Scandinavian but even pan-Germanic. Even in Suetonius' account, Caligula, whilst dressing up the Gauls – his slaves – as Germanic tribesmen for a re-enactment of a triumph over the latter, orders them to GROW THEIR HAIR LONG (36), even though the standard epithet for Gaul in Roman literature was comata – 'shaggy' (37). The Vandals were ruled by the royal house of the Hasdingi – literally
'those with women's hair', 'the long-haired' (38). Among the Franks in the 6th century, long hair was a sign of royal dignity; it was cut off as a sign of humiliation and abdication from the throne (Gregory of Tours) (39). In

the medieval *Song of Roland*, there are frequent references to Emperor Charlemagne's beard hanging over his armour and his grey curls, as well as his 'regiment of bearded men'; in *The Cart of Nimes*, Charlemagne's vassal, Guillaume, kills a Moor who had seized him by the beard (40). Paul the Deacon mentions the long beards of the Lombards, from which, in fact, the tribe's name derives (41). A statue of a Swabian from pagan times, with a long beard and nine plaits, has survived (42). In the *Song of the Nibelungs*, Siegfried defeats his opponent by seizing him by the beard (43). The German medieval *Song of Gudrun* states:

'The aged warriors Wate and Frute appeared at court with long grey locks intertwined with gold, and everyone agreed that they truly looked like valiant knights who had earned their honours (!)'. The same Wate later appears 'with a long, bushy beard'. The father of the title character in the 'Tale of Wolfditrich', King Gugditrich, had 'long, curly fair hair that fell upon his shoulders and reached down to his waist'. Wolfditrich's tutor, Duke Berchtung, is threatened by his enemies with having 'his entire beard plucked out hair by hair' (44), and so on. It is noteworthy that one of the greatest figures of the Germanic tribes went down in world history under the nickname Barbarossa. It is hardly likely that Swedish customs would have been an exception to the general Germanic rule – in any case, no evidence of this has survived.

Thus, in the Scandinavian tradition – and more broadly, in the Scandi-Germanic tradition – long, well-groomed hair and an imposing beard were essential attributes of a free man and, especially, a man of noble birth. Not only shaving off one's beard, but even touching it was a mortal insult. A shaved head was a sign of extreme poverty and disgrace, whilst the word 'beardless' was grounds for blood feuds.

It is clear that the customs of the Rus' not only differed from those of the Scandinavians – which stemmed directly from ethnic worship – but also directly contradicted them.

Chapter 4: The Customs of the Turks

Usually, when commenting on Svyatoslav's appearance, researchers suggest a 'connection with the customs of the steppe peoples' (Syzyumov, Ivanov),
a 'Turkic hairstyle' (Petrukhin), or an 'appearance not typical of the Southern Rus' but rather of the Pechenegs' (Chlenov) (45).

If this were the case, it would seem rather strange. We have established that Svyatoslav's appearance was not an exception but the norm amongst the Rus', and we should speak not of an isolated instance of imitating a foreign custom, but of its widespread adoption by the entire people. As for contacts between the Turks and the Scandinavians (whom the 'Normanists' regard as the Rus'), these were neither prolonged nor close in the mid-10th century. We see no circumstances under which a custom—one that was, moreover, considered shameful from the Scandinavians' point of view—could have been adopted from a completely alien people.

However, what did the Eastern European Turks of the first millennium AD actually look like? More specifically, what hairstyles did they wear? As a rule, this was a plait – either a single one (as seen on Polovtsian idols (46), on the rim of a Khazar sacrificial ladle (47), in Byzantine descriptions of the Avars (48)) or several (on the bow of a Khazar saddle (49)). Petrukhin himself writes: 'Braids are an ethnic characteristic of medieval Turks. A particular hairstyle – loose hair – is intended to emphasise the exceptional status of a ruler' (50). In light of this, what sort of 'Turkic hairstyle' could Svyatoslav possibly be said to have had? As for the faces of the Polovtsian and Khazar idols – they are either completely bald or, in addition to a moustache, have a goatee.

But perhaps this is indeed a specifically Pecheneg appearance? We have no information regarding the Pechenegs' hairstyle – assuming it really did differ from the general Turkic style – but we do know what a Pecheneg's face looked like: Abu Dulef, in the 10th century, mentions the Pechenegs' long beards and moustaches (51). The epic of the Oghuz, who were related to the Pechenegs, *Kitabi Dadam Korkut*—whose title character is almost a namesake of Kurkute-Kuri, the murderer of Svyatoslav—frequently mentions the heroes' long beards: 'Will you not like the grey hairs in my great beard? I have taken the lives of many white-bearded and

black-bearded warriors!'; 'Your white-bearded father'; 'He seized Beyrak by the beard' (52), and so on.

The only source from which one might draw a conclusion about the resemblance between Svyatoslav's appearance and that of the Turks is a quotation from Procopius of Caesarea concerning the appearance of the followers of one of the 'circus factions' in Constantinople. This appearance was described as 'an imitation of the Massagetae or the Huns' and consisted of wearing distinctive clothing and hairstyles: shaved cheeks and chin, a head shaved all round with a tuft of hair at the nape of the neck (53).

It would seem that Svyatoslav's appearance corresponds almost perfectly to this description. However, there are two important 'buts': firstly, there is too great a time gap between this account and Leo the Deacon's *History*; a gap of practically the same duration separates Svyatoslav from the first Zaporozhian Cossacks, with whom researchers generally deny any direct continuity. Secondly, it is unclear exactly which people are meant here by 'Massagetae or Huns'? Interestingly, in Procopius's own work, this paired mention occurs once more in the description of the Slavs and the Ants: these peoples lead a 'Massagetae way of life' and have 'Hunnic customs' (54). These words are usually regarded as literary, meaningless rhetoric. However, in the light of the above information, it may be surmised that this is a reference to specific features of the Slavs' appearance. It is noteworthy that the faction which imitated
'the Huns and Massagetae' was called the Veneti, which is entirely consistent with the name 'Veneti' given to the Slavs (55). Perhaps this similarity was the reason for such an unusual choice of role model.

Overall, having examined the customs of the medieval Turks, one can safely conclude that the hairstyles of Sviatoslav and the Rus' of the 9th–11th centuries could not possibly have been a Turkic borrowing, if only because the Turks did not wear such hairstyles! However, there are indications that the Slavs of the 6th century may have had a similar appearance. Let us examine how widespread the practice of shaving beards and heads was amongst the Slavs as a whole.

Chapter 5: Customs of the Slavs

The Russian reader has generally formed an image of the ancient Slav with hair almost down to the shoulders, tied back above the eyebrows with a ribbon, sporting a shovel-like beard, and so on. In a number of historical novels – B. Vasilyev's
's *The Prophetic Oleg* and Y. Nikitin's *Ingvar and Olkha* – bearded Slavs are contrasted with beardless, shaven-headed Rus'. The same stereotypes prompted Gerasimov to give the reconstructed likeness of Yaroslav the Wise a goatee 'à la Ivan the Terrible'. As we recall, this turned out to be a mistake. Here we can see how stereotypes of non-scientific origin influence even quite reputable scholars.

Once again, let us begin with the appearance of the gods. Slavic pagan iconography (or would it be more accurate to say 'idolography'?) knows virtually no long-bearded gods and none with long hair at all. Idols with moustaches but no beards are extremely common. In fact, the Rus' of the 9th–10th centuries did not worship Grey-bearded Odin or Red-bearded Thor, but Perun, who had 'a golden moustache' (56). In the miniatures of the Radziwill Chronicle, no moustache is visible, nor, for that matter, a beard. However, a 'herring-tail' forelock is clearly visible, descending towards the left ear in true Zaporozhian style (57). An intriguing parallel to the chronicle's Perun is Chernoglav from Rügen, who is depicted with a silver moustache (58). The island's principal deity, Svyatovit, had 'hair and a beard, cut short' (in other translations – 'shaved' (59)) in accordance with 'the custom of the Ruyans' (60).

Figurines from the Ants period in the famous Martynov treasure depict men with short-cropped hair, moustachioed and beardless (61). As for Rus', 'the notion that all men in pre-Petrine times wore beards seems exaggerated. Until the 16th century, wearing a beard… was not compulsory even for the clergy. Ancient book illustrations frequently depict beardless men (in particular, the Novgorod birich – an official – is also beardless)" (62). The bas-reliefs of the white-stone St George's Cathedral in Yuryev-Polsky depict

the prince's retinue with cropped or shaved hair and no beards (63).

In Russian bylinas there is a curious episode, as if a mirror image of the story of Audun from the Western Fjords. Dobrynya Nikitich, after long wanderings, returns to his mother's home, where he is already presumed dead. When he identifies himself, he hears in reply:

> Young Dobrynya Nikitich had golden curls: they coiled in
> three rows round the crown of his head (the top of his head? –
> *L. P.*). But yours, you tavern bum, hang down to your
> shoulders! (64)

In other words, it was precisely long hair that was a sign of a marginalised figure, a vagrant, amongst the Rus'. The warrior nobility wore their hair cut 'in a bowl-shape' ('in three rows' around the crown). Dobrynya, who had let himself go and allowed his hair to grow long, was literally unrecognised by his own mother!

There is not a single Russian epic or historical figure known whose nickname reflects a beard or its characteristics (cf. Viking nicknames); instead, we have: Vasily Us, Usynya the Bogatyr from fairy tales, Belous, Sivous (65) and so on. The name-nickname Sineus (66) actually belongs to the Rus' people and cannot be derived from the Scandinavian onomasticon; the absurd attempt to 'translate' it as 'Sin haus' (one's own house) was rejected by the Norse scholars themselves (67). However, if one simply reads it, without over-analysing, as a Slavic nickname, it provides a fitting 'counterpart' to Thörvald the Blue-Bearded of the Icelandic sagas.

Even Gedeonov, without referring to Ademar of Chabannes, asserted that the wearing of beards and long hair only became somewhat widespread amongst the Eastern Slavs after their baptism (68), and even then, as we have seen, by no means immediately. Moscow boyars shaved their heads (69), and sometimes their beards too, as can be seen in Western engravings depicting Moscow envoys. The Stoglav Council, by prohibiting the shaving of beards and heads as a sign of 'heresy', thereby attests to the prevalence of this custom (70). Yet even after this, many Russians continued to shave their beards; Boris Godunov, for example – contemporary depictions once again present us with an image far removed from the textbook image of a Shalyapin-style bearded man. Of particular interest is a decree by Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, in which shaving the beard is placed on a par with such practices as the invocation of Kolyada, Usenya and the Plough, the singing of

‘demonic’ songs, skomorokh performances, the baking of ritual bread in the shape of birds and animals, and so on, as remnants of a pagan past (71).

Ilovaisky, citing the list of Bulgarian princes and Liutprand, notes the custom of shaving the head among the Bulgarians (72). As we have seen, this cannot be explained by Turkic influence. A miniature in the Vatican Menologion depicts a Bulgarian with his beard and head shaved (73).

The Polish szlachta also shaved their heads and beards. The Polish-Ukrainian
‘katsap’ – ‘like a goat’ – reflected the negative attitude of this section of the Slavic peoples towards the beards of the late Muscovites and the post-Petrine Great Russians. In Saxon’s Grammar, it is precisely by his shaved head that a Slav is recognised in a certain Sveno (74). The Moravians shaved their heads and beards (75). Kozma of Prague, describing a noble Czech of the time of Boleslav the Terrible, notes the double forelock on his shaved head (76).

The *Great Chronicle*, describing the last representative of the hereditary nobility on the Polish throne – Kotyshko – who was replaced by the Piasts, who came from the common people, states that his entire head was bald, with the exception of a single tuft of hair on the crown – a perfect analogy with Svyatoslav (77). Prince Wenceslaus is depicted with a similar hairstyle in the miniatures of the Wolfenbüttel Manuscript (78). Western authors note that the high priest of the Ruyans wore long hair and a beard, *contrary to popular custom (79)*. In chronicle entries from the 9th–11th centuries, a beard is mentioned only once, and again in connection with the Magi:
‘potergashe brade ju’ (80). Might the bearded Rus’ mentioned in Arab sources have been priests? Thitmar of Merseburg attributes the wearing of forelocks to the warlike tribe of the Lutici (81).

It is curious that whilst the Scandinavians regarded shaved beards and hair as a mark of disgrace, the Slavs, for their part, regarded the Scandinavians’ custom of wearing long hair and plaiting it into braids as disgraceful and ‘womanly’. A tradition reported by the Polish chronicler Kadłubek states that, according to the Poles, the Scandinavians were forced to wear ‘feminine’ hairstyles by the Slavs who had conquered them, as a sign of submission and disgrace (81).

The Balts, who were related to the Slavs, were also not inclined to let their hair and beards grow. In Lithuanian legends, Crusader knights of Scandi-Germanic origin are consistently referred to as ‘bearded men’,
‘bearded villains’ (82), which implies a lack of beards

of the storytellers and their listeners who emphasised this trait. In medieval depictions of the Prussians, we see shaved beards, long moustaches and short-cropped hair (sometimes with tufts visible) (83). In the iconographic tradition of Lithuania, the depiction of Jagiello (Jagiello) bears a strong resemblance to Prince Sviatoslav. This was also the general appearance of the Lithuanian szlachta of that time (84).

Thus, we see that Sviatoslav's appearance—which was diametrically opposed to Scandinavian customs and had no parallels in Turkic cultures—fit perfectly within the Baltic-Slavic traditions.

Conclusion

To summarise our research, we can say that hairstyles were a significant ethnic identifier in traditional society, particularly during the pagan era, as they constituted a form of imitatio dei – the imitation of ethnic patron gods – and ensured a mystical unity with them, as well as the prosperity of the people and the country. Svyatoslav's hairstyle was by no means a whim of the prince or an imitation of some external fashion. With the possible exception of the forelock, this was the most common appearance of the Rus' in the 9th–10th centuries, which largely persisted until the end of the 11th century. This appearance stood in stark contrast to Scandinavian customs: whilst among the Rus a shaved head and chin were a 'sign of noble lineage', amongst the Scandinavians they were a mark of shame and utter humiliation. This appearance was not similar to that of the Turks, the vast majority of whom wore plaits. This appearance fits entirely within the traditions of the Balto-Slavs.

One can, of course, cite examples of similar hairstyles among non-Slavic peoples. One can cite examples where Slavs (very old men, pagan priests or, conversely, Christians) looked different. But none of this in the slightest undermines the main conclusion of this study – namely, that the Slavs looked like this more often than not, and, more importantly, that neither the Turks nor, in particular, the noble Scandinavians EVER, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, looked like this.

Why, then, do Normanists – including such a brilliant expert on Turkic customs as Petrukhin – insist, against all evidence, on 'Svyatoslav's Turkic hairstyle'? One must assume that, otherwise, they would have to acknowledge – and somehow explain – a completely implausible fact: that the 'Scandinavian' Rus', within less than a century and in the third generation of the dynasty, adopted a custom that was not merely alien but downright shameful in the eyes of their Scandinavian
'ancestors', and had adopted it not even from their neighbours – albeit the savage Pechenegs – but from their subjugated tributaries, the Slavs, and, to top it all, had come to regard this custom as a 'mark of the family's nobility'.

Needless to say, history simply knows of no such examples. Conquering invaders either made every effort not to assimilate with the conquered (a striking example of this is the legendary Indian king Sagara, who, having conquered KIN tribes, forcibly compelled them to change their customs, including, incidentally, ‘forced them… either to shave their heads or to grow beards, so that they might be distinguished from his native subjects’ (85)), or they imposed their own customs upon them, to the point of complete assimilation (a textbook example being the Germanic peoples east of the Elbe).

What conclusion, then, can be drawn from the above? Of course, these ‘hairstyles’ are not the only evidence allowing us to reject the theory of the Rus’ Scandinavian origin and to confirm their Balto-Slavic roots. These descriptions of the Rus’ tattoos, their clothing, weaponry and martial arts, the names and depictions of their deities and the layout of their sanctuaries, the circumstances of their conversion to Christianity, their writing system and names – everything that can be grouped under the concept of an ethnic portrait. But it is precisely the ‘hairstyle’ that proves, more vividly and clearly than anything else, that it was Prince Sviatoslav who arrived on the Danube at the head of his Slavic retinue, and not the ‘King Svendisleif’ invented by the Normanists (86).

Notes

1. *Petukhin, V.Y.* The Beginnings of the Ethnocultural History of Rus' in the 9th–11th Centuries. Smolensk: Rusich; Moscow: Gnosis, 1995.

2. *Leo the Deacon.* History. Moscow: Nauka, 1988, p. 82.

3. *Ilovaisky, D.I.* History of Russia. The Beginnings of Rus'. Moscow: 'Charlie', 1996, p. 344.

4. *Andreev, Yu.V.* The Price of Freedom and Harmony. A Few Brushstrokes towards a Portrait of Greek Civilisation. St Petersburg: Aleteya, 1999, p. 145.

5. *Kovalev, S.I.* *History of Rome*. Leningrad: Leningrad State University Press, 1986, p. 685.

6. See, for example, Myths of the Peoples of the World. Moscow: Soviet Encyclopaedia, 1991. Vol. 1, ill. on p. 503. *Semenov, F.F., and Kirillova, A.A.* *Album on the History of the Middle Ages*. Moscow: State Publishing House of the Russian SFSR, 1960, p. 17, etc.

7. *Eliade, M.* The Sacred and the Profane. Moscow: Moscow State University Press, 1994, p. 66,
70.

8. Literary Monuments of Ancient Rus' from the 11th to the Early 12th Century. Moscow,
Fiction, 1978, pp. 48–49.

9. *Ilovaisky, D.I.* Op. cit., p. 366.

10. *Gedeonov, S.A.* The Varangians and Rus'. St Petersburg, 1876, p. 365.

11. *Ilovaisky, D.I.* Op. cit., p. 174.

12. *Karpov, A.Yu.* Saint Vladimir. Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 1997, p. 173.

13. *Sotnikova, M.P., & Spassky, I.G.* The Millennium of the Oldest Coins of Russia. (Comprehensive Catalogue of Russian Coins of the 10th–11th Centuries, Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1983, p. 61. The authors draw a direct parallel between the images on the coins and Leo the Deacon's description of Svyatoslav.)

14. *Yanin, V. L., and Gaidukov, P. G.* Official Seals of Ancient Rus' in the 10th–15th Centuries. Moscow: Intrada, 1998, p. 19, ill. on p. 259.

15. History of the Arts of the of the USSR. Moscow, Fine Arts, 1973, p. 391.

16. *Rabinovich M.G.* Essays of material Culture of the Russian feudal town. Moscow: Nauka, 1988, colour plates included, p. 1.

17. Monuments… p. 303.

18. *Gedeonov, S.A.* Op. cit., p. 365.

19. Beowulf. The Elder Edda. Song of Nibelungs. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1975, pp. 21, 219–223.
20. *Snorri Sturluson.* The World's Circle. Moscow, Ladomir, 1995, p. 70.
21. *Piecarcyk, St.* Germanic Mythology. Warsaw, 1979, p. 105.
22. Myths of the Peoples of the World. Vol. 2, illustration on p. 519.
23. Icelandic Sagas. Irish epic. Moscow, Fiction, 1973, p. 120.
24. Myths of the Peoples of the World. Vol. 2, ill. on p. 572.
25. Icelandic Sagas… pp. 840–854.
26. *Snorri Sturluson.* Op. cit., pp. 671–681.
27. The Volsung Saga // The Roots of Yggdrasil. Moscow, TERRA, 1997, p. 217.
28. *Snorri Sturluson.* Op. cit., p. 124.
29. Proverbs of the Russian People. Moscow, Russkaya Kniga, 1993, vol. 1, pp. 76.
30. Icelandic Sagas… p. 83.
31. Ibid., p. 192. (Njal's lack of a beard, judging by his Celtic name, is linked to a different ethnic tradition, but we shall not delve into this rather interesting topic here.)
32. Ibid., pp. 213, 224, 227, 228.
33. Ibid., p. 228.
34. Stig the Standard-Bearer: Swedish and Danish Folk Ballads. L., Children's Literature, pp. 13–14.
35. *Adam of Bremen.* History of the Hamburg Church // Glazyrina, G.V. Icelandic Viking Sagas about Northern Rus'. Moscow: Ladomir, 1996, p. 210.
36. *Shirokova, N.S.* Celtic Culture and the Nordic Tradition of Antiquity. St Petersburg, Eurasia, 2000, p. 83.
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39. *Grigory Tursky.* History of the Franks // History of the Middle Ages. Moscow, Prosveshchenie, 1969, pp. 30–31.
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119, 124, 125, 251, 252, etc.

41. Myths of the Peoples of the World. Vol. 2, p. 241.

42. *Nigel Penning, Prudence Jones.* A History of Pagan Europe. St Petersburg, Eurasia, 2000, p. 232, ill. on p. 234.

43. Beowulf… p. 415.

44. The Heirs of the Wulfings. Moscow, Argus, 1994, pp. 135, 220, 231, 244.

45. *Suzumov, N. Ya.… Ivanov, S.A.* Commentaries // Lev the Deacon, Op. cit., p. 214. *Petrukhin, V. Ya.* Op. cit., pp. 110, 193. *Chlenov, A. M.* In the Footsteps of Dobrynya. Moscow: Nauka, 1971, p. 120.

46. The Steppes of Eurasia in the Middle Ages. Moscow: Nauka, 1981, pp. 264–
265.

47. *Petrukhin, V.Ya.* Op. cit., p. 187.

48. *Ilovaisky, D.I.* Op. cit., p. 173. *Merpert, N.Ya.* 'The Avars in Eastern Europe // Essays on the History of the USSR. Moscow: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1958. Vol. 2, p. 571.

49. *Pletneva, S.A.* The Khazars. Moscow: Nauka, 1986, p. 25.

50. *Petrukhin, V.Y.* Op. cit., p. 187.

51. *Pletneva, S.A.* 'The Pechenegs' // Essays on the History of the USSR. Vol. 2, p. 726.

52. The Book of Our Father Korkut. Baku: Yazichech, 1989, pp. 114, 118, 213 et al.

53. *Ilovaisky, D.I.* Op. cit., p. 173. (It appears that Ilovaisky drew on other translations. In later editions, this hairstyle is described quite differently: Procopius of Caesarea. The War with the Persians. The War against the Vandals. The Secret History.) Moscow: Nauka, 1993, p. 338.

54. Procopius of Caesarea on the Slavs // Materials on the History of the USSR. Issue 1, Moscow, Vysshaya Shkola, 1985, p. 226.

55. *Sedov, V.V.* The Slavs in Antiquity. Moscow: Archaeology Foundation, 1994, p.
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56. Literary Monuments of Ancient Rus'. pp. 94–95.

57. The Radziwill Chronicle. St Petersburg: Glagol; Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1992.
Vol. 1, pp. 16, 26, 45.

58. *Famintsin, A.S.* The Deities of the Ancient Slavs. St Petersburg: Aleteya, 1995, p. 29.

59. Quoted from *Herrmann, J.* 'The Obodrites, the Lutici and the Ruyani' // *The Slavs and the Scandinavians*. Moscow: Progress, 1986, p. 358.

60. *Famintsyn, A.S.* Op. cit., p. 27.

61. *Sedov V.V.* The Slavs in the early Middle Ages. Moscow, Archaeology Foundation, 1995, p. 77.

62. *Rabinovich, M.G.* Op. cit., p. 202.

63. Ancient Rus'. Everyday Life and Culture. Moscow: Nauka, 1997, p. 197, Table 113
on p. 359, figs. 25–57.

64. *Buslaev, F.I.* The Russian Bogatyr Epic. The Russian Folk Epic. Voronezh, Central Black Earth Publishing House, 1987, p. 124. (A.V. Zhuravlev, Deputy Director of the Centre for Distance Learning in IT at the National Academy of Public Administration under the President of Ukraine (NAPU), points to references in Ukrainian legends to the 'chupyna' – a headdress wound three times round the head – worn by the finest Zaporozhian warriors, the 'kharakters' (personal communication).

65. *Gedeonov, S.A.* Op. cit., p. 363.

66. Monuments of the Literature of Ancient Rus'. pp. 36–37.

67. *Petrukhin, V.Y.* Comments // Lovmyansky, H. Rus' and the Normans. Moscow: Progress, 1985, p. 275

68. *Gedeonov, S.A.* Op. cit., p. 363.

69. *Valishchevsky, K.* Ivan the Terrible. Moscow: IKPA, 1989, p. 110.

70. Stoglav. St Petersburg: Kotanchinov Publishers, 1863, p. 124.

71. The Decree of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich // Tales of the Russian People, collected by I.P. Sakharov. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1990, pp. 388–390.

72. *Ilovaisky, D.I.* Op. cit., p. 173.

73. *Niederle, L.* Slavic Antiquities. Moscow: Aleteya, 2000, ill. on p. 254. (The Bulgarians also have a custom of leaving a tuft of hair resembling a herring on a shaved head – 'chembas' (Vulchev, Y.T. Two Sayings of Jesus Christ. Sofia: St Clement of Ohrid University Press, 1998, p. 65). I would like to thank Anton R. Rachev for this information.)

74. *Gedeonov, S.A.* Op. cit., p. 363.

75. *Niederle, L.* Op. cit., p. 259. (For some reason, the author considers this hairstyle to be non-Slavic and borrowed. As we can see, the source data indicate the opposite.)

76. *Gedeonov, S.A.* Op. cit., p. 361.

77. *The Great Chronicle* of Poland, Rus' and their neighbours in the 11th–13th centuries. Moscow: Moscow State University Press, 1987, p. 62. (The commentator (p. 208) particularly notes the similarity to Sviatoslav's hairstyle.)

78. *Niederle, L.* Op. cit. Illustrations on pp. 190, 247.
79. *Famintsin, A.S.* Op. cit., p. 52.
80. Literary Monuments of Ancient Rus', pp. 190–191.
81. *Gilferding, A.* *History of the Baltic Slavs*. Moscow: VNIIONEG, 1994, p. 78.
82. Dainos. Lithuanian Folk Songs. Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1944, p. 28.
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85. *Temkin, E.N., and Erman, V.G.* Myths of Ancient India. Moscow: RIK Rusanova, Astrel, AST, 2000, pp. 283–284.
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Appendix II
Race and Ethnicity in Bylinas

When it comes to ethnic self-identity, the principles by which a people define 'their own' and 'outsiders' clearly play a paramount role. It cannot be overlooked that in the self-identity of modern Russians, the factor of race, or 'blood', plays a negligible role. Unlike the Germans, for whom 'Blut und Boden' formed and continue to form an inseparable unity, in Russian public consciousness over recent centuries the question has tended to be framed as 'Blut oder Boden', with a clear preference for the latter. This is characteristic not only of mass consciousness but also of the so-called 'nationally minded intelligentsia' (A.G. Kuzmin, V.V. Kozhinov) and even of certain ideologues of far-right organisations (A.P. Barkashov, RNE; E.V. Limonov, NBP).

The views of all those listed above on the subject of ethnicity and race can be summarised as follows: 'The Russian idea has NEVER been based on blood; a Russian is someone who loves Russia and has embraced Russian culture. Orthodox Christianity and so on, race and ancestry play no part; Russians are, by their very nature, a mixed people; the white West is unequivocally the ENEMY, whilst the Ural-Altaic 'indigenous peoples of Russia' are potential allies, 'brothers'. It is telling that the synonym for the word 'nationalist' in Russia is 'pochvennik' (a proponent of the 'soil' theory), rather than
'racist'. On the contrary, for most Russians, 'racism' is part of the image of the enemy – and the most repugnant part at that. The racism of the Balts, Caucasians and so on offends today's Russian not so much because of its anti-Russian nature, but in and of itself, as something that is by definition
'bad'. In contemporary anti-Semitic publications, Jews are accused of racism, almost above all else.

This approach is by no means new. As far back as the nineteenth century, it was espoused by the first proponents of the nationalist movement in Russian public thought – the Slavophiles (A.S. Khomyakov's *Semiramis*). Their writings, whilst clearly anti-German in orientation, extolled Russia's ability to coexist and form bonds with the peoples of the taiga, the steppe, the tundra, and the inhabitants of the Caucasus.

Just like contemporary representatives of the ‘nationally minded’ intelligentsia, the Slavophiles regarded the complete absence of racial self-awareness (i.e. the inability to regard racially closely related peoples as ‘one’s own’, and those of a different race as ‘outsiders’) as a kind of age-old, primordial trait of the Russian and, more broadly, the Slavic character.

How accurate is this assertion?

To resolve this question, it seems fruitful to turn to the Russian epic tradition – the bylina and ballads. The very fact that they have been preserved through oral transmission from at least the pre-Mongol period proves their authority as expressions of Russian self-identity. We shall not dwell on the question of the origins of the bylina, or their historical or mythological background – this is of no fundamental importance to us. What is important to us is the reflection of the ethnic and racial question in the bylina.

Let us tentatively identify three groups of foreigners described in the epic. These are white Indo-European Europe (the land of Lyakhovets, the land of Pomorya, the city of Ledenets beyond the Virians’ [Varangian] Sea, the land of Talyan, etc.), the steppe East (the Golden Horde, the land of the Turks, the Kingdom of Zadonsk, the Kingdom of the Tatars, etc.) and, finally, the forest Ugro-Finnic tribes (the Liviks, the Karelians, the Chuds).

It is evident that the highest degree of inter-ethnic hostility, its most striking manifestation, is war. Conversely, the most vivid manifestation of mutual sympathy between ethnic groups is marriage and, more generally, intimate contact between their members. Let us examine, in turn, the Russian epic’s attitude towards the peoples of the East, the Finno-Ugric tribes and the West – through the prism of war and love.

War with the East forms the core of the bylin epic; it would be pointless even to list the plots devoted to it. One can only note that this is an uncompromising war in which no peace with the enemy is possible; the best possible outcome is: ‘he left not a single Tatar (a conventional ethnic term denoting a steppe dweller in general) alive, not even for sowing’. A similar attitude is held towards the Byzantines (‘Gleb Volodyevich and Marinka Kaidalovna’) and the Khazar Jews, embodied in the figures of the bogatyr Zhidovin and the little tsar Koscherishch.

Strange as it may seem, the epic also recalls the wars with the Finno-Ugrians, although their historical role, compared with the conflict with the Steppe, seems

very minor. These are the wars against the Karelian Liviks (‘Prince Roman and the Livik Brothers’) and the ‘white-eyed Chuds’ (‘Dobrynya Subdued the Chuds’, ballads
‘On the Lithuanian Frontier’). What is striking is the extreme intransigence and cruelty of the conflicts described in the bylina and ballads. The enemy side is portrayed almost more hostile than in the bylinas devoted to the wars with the Steppe. The constant epithets for Korela in the Russian epic – ‘Cursed Korela, treacherous Korela’ – also point to a high degree of alienation.

The picture is quite the opposite when it comes to the West: the epic simply ignores all the centuries-long wars with the Poles, Lithuanians, the Teutonic Order, the Varangians and the Swedes. The Northern Russian bylin narrators evidently regarded the ancient raids by the steppe peoples on the borders of Kyiv and the subjugation of the forest savages as more important than the conflicts with their western neighbours, which were closer in time and space. As if it were a collective Russian Bismarck, the bylin proclaims: ‘There is no enemy in the West!’

In ‘marriage’ narratives, by contrast, much more attention is paid to the West. Prince Vladimir takes a wife from the land of Lyakhovitsy or Pomorye. In the Pomoryan lands, the bogatyr Svyatogor also finds himself a wife. In the Lyakhovitsa lands, the bogatyr Dunay finds his bride. From across the Varangian Sea, a suitor—Solovey Budimirovich—arrives for the prince’s niece, Zabava. Ilya Muromets lives with a certain widow in the ‘Talyan lands’. ‘Groom Vasily Mikulovich’ arrives from the Lyakhovitsa region to visit the same Zabava; he turns out to be Vasilisa Mikulichna, who rescues her husband from imprisonment by Vladimir. All this is portrayed in the bylina as perfectly normal occurrences.

The situation is quite different when it comes to the East. A woman from the East is a treacherous witch who woos a Russian bogatyr with the sole aim of destroying him. The bogatyr unmasks and executes her (‘Mikhail Potyk’,
‘Gleb Volodyevich and Marinka Kaidalovna’). Vladimir’s wife, Aprakseya, portrayed as by no means a woman of high moral character, resolutely rejects the ‘hand and heart’ of the ‘Tatar’ Idolishche, in whose power she finds herself. In another bylina, the same Idolishche woos the prince’s niece, and she, seeking to rid herself of her suitor, resorts to such an extreme measure as poisoning, whilst Alyosha Popovich destroys the matchmakers who have arrived with the suitor. The bylina describes all this with the utmost sympathy, just as it does Ivan Godinovich’s brutal punishment of his

bride, who had become involved with a steppe ‘tsarishche’. Her body parts that had caressed or touched the ‘Tatar’—her hand, leg, lips and tongue—are severed one by one. Only then is her head cut off. A punishment of unprecedented cruelty implies an offence of unprecedented gravity.

The theme of captivity is closely linked to that of marriage, as Russian ‘female captives’ are almost always mentioned, but not ‘male captives’. The tragedy of the situation lies in the fact that a Russian woman—one of their own—is in the hands of the enemy and a foreigner.

A ‘miraculous rescue’ is the title of a ballad in which the heroine, fleeing from the ‘Crimean tsar’, crashes into a ‘white, fiery rock’. Her body and clothes are transformed into a church, forests, mountains and seas.

Of particular interest to our topic is the ballad

‘The Death of the Captive’. A captive fleeing from the Tatars asks a ferryman to take her across the river ‘to Rus’. He demands that she marry him in return. The girl angrily refuses: her lineage is too noble—in some versions ‘princes and boyars’, in others simply ‘my mother is the crimson sun, and my father the young, bright moon’.

‘So shall I marry you, you MORDOVICH?’

The Tatars appear; the girl throws herself into the water and drowns.

Incidentally, it is worth noting that marriage to a Finno-Ugric ‘Mordovich’ is regarded as just as unacceptable as marriage to a ‘Tatar’.

Suicide, as a preferred alternative to Tatar captivity, is also reflected in the ‘Tale of the Ruin of Ryazan’, which is steeped in folkloric motifs.

Against this tragic backdrop, the sole ‘Western’ version of the captive girl’s story stands out for its utter lack of drama. A certain ‘pan’ promises his ‘panya’ that he will bring a captive from Rus’—and does so. There is no tragedy; no legends emerge from the wars with western neighbours comparable to the tale of Eupraxia of Zaraysk. One gets the impression that the horror of Tatar captivity lies not in the fact that it is captivity, but in the fact that it is TATAR.

So, let us summarise. In the bylina, the Turks and the Finno-Ugrians are enemies; marriage to them is a disgrace, and any means are justified to avoid it. Any connection with a representative of these peoples is severely punished by fate or by people. Europeans are ‘one of us’; marriage to them is the norm, and there are no wars with them (or rather, they are consigned to oblivion, like a family quarrel). There is a clear racial dichotomy, supposedly alien to the Slavs. The Russian epic is

is the epic of Europe's outpost, the White World, against the savage hordes of the taiga and the steppe.

It is precisely this conception that should be regarded as the original, most ancient, folk version of the Russian idea, subsequently distorted under the influence of imported ideologies – Byzantine (10th–17th centuries), liberal (18th–early 20th centuries) and communist (1917–1991) (It is striking to note the remarkable similarity in the assessment by ecclesiastical and Soviet historiography of the figures of Alexander Nevsky and Dmitry Donskoy.)

Recent research in the fields of archaeology and genetic morphology fully confirms the validity of the folk narrators' accounts: the Russians and the Slavs belong, in cultural and racial terms, to Europe and the white world. And therefore, any attempts to formulate the 'Russian Idea' without taking these facts into account cannot be taken seriously.

The author would like to express his gratitude to:

To Rod, the All-Father, for the very existence of the world. To Makosh the Spinner – for all our fortunes and misfortunes.

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Klein, L.S. – a contemporary Russian historian.

Kovachev, N.P. (born 1919) – a Bulgarian linguist and historian. Kozhinov, V.V. – a Russian historian, literary scholar and publicist. Kozma of Prague (1045–1135) – a Czech chronicler.

Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (905–959) – Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire (945–959). He is best known for his treatises, two of which have survived: 'On Court Ceremonies' and 'On the Administration of the Empire'. He was poisoned by his son and daughter-in-law.

Constantine Manasses (12th century) – Byzantine poet.

Korolev, A.S. – Russian contemporary historian.

Lebedev, G.S. – Soviet archaeologist.

Leo the Deacon (950–1012) – a Byzantine chronicler, author of the only detailed account in Byzantine historiography of the customs, rituals, armaments, military tactics and appearance of the Rus'.

Levchenko, M.V. (1890–1955) – a Russian Soviet historian. Liutprand of Cremona (10th century) – a Lombard bishop.

Lomonosov M.V. (1711–1765) – a great Russian scholar and polymath. Historian, grammarian, chemist, physicist.

Mauricius the Strategos (7th century) – Byzantine emperor, author of the *Strategikon* – a manual on military affairs.

Marr N.Y. (1864–1934) – Soviet linguist, academician, researcher of Caucasian languages.

Menander Protector (6th century) – Byzantine historian. Metz,

Adam – Swiss historian and orientalist.

Miklyaev, A.M. – Russian Soviet archaeologist.

Miller, G.F. (1705–1783) – a German historian who specialised in Russian history. He is regarded as one of the founders of the Norman theory.

Mishin, D.E. – a contemporary Russian historian. Moses the Lawgiver – the founder of Judaism and a lawgiver.

Moses (Movses) Kagantakavatsi – an Armenian historian.

Moses (Movses) of Khoren (Khorenatsi) (5th–6th centuries) – an Armenian historian.

Muhammad Bal-ami (10th century) – a Persian historian.

Nestor (second half of the 11th century – early 12th century) – a monk of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, chronicler. Presumably the author of *The Tale of Bygone Years*.

Alexander Nechvolodov – a Russian historian of the early 20th century.

Lubor Niederle (1865–1944) – a renowned Czech historian, archaeologist and Slavist.

Nizami, Nizam al-Din Abu Muhammad Ilyas ibn Yusuf (d. 1203) – a great Persian poet.

Novoseltsev, A.P. – a contemporary historian and orientalist.

Nogmov, Sh.B. (19th century) – a collector and publisher of Adyghe folklore, a former mullah, and a friend of Pushkin.

Paul the Deacon (720 – year of death unknown) – a Lombard chronicler who lived in Italy.

Pytheas (4th century BC) – traveller, geographer. Pogodin, M.P. (1800–1875) – Russian historian.

Procopius of Caesarea (6th century) – court historian to Justinian I the Great.

Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor (7th century) – a Syrian author.

Pushkin, A.S. (1799–1837) – a great Russian poet.

Rabanus Maurus (10th century) – a German monk, author of a treatise on runes.

Rybakov B.A. (1908–2001) – Russian, Soviet historian and archaeologist, scholar and patriot.

Sakharov, A.N. – a Russian Soviet historian. Sedov,

V.V. – a Russian Soviet archaeologist.

M.L. Seryakov – a contemporary Russian historian.

E. Ch. Skrzhinskaya (1899–1981) – Soviet researcher and historian.

Snorri Sturluson (1178–1241) – an Icelandic poet and politician. Compiler of collections of myths and heroic legends *The Younger Edda* and *The Circle of the Earth*.

I.I. Sreznevsky (1812–1880) – Russian linguist, ethnographer, and compiler of the first historical dictionary of the Russian language.

Stefanos Asokhik (10th century) – an Armenian historian.

Cornelius Tacitus (1st century) – Roman historian, chronicler, writer and traveller.

Titmar of Merseburg (975–1018) – German chronicler. Tolkien,

J.R.R. – English writer and scholar.

V. N. Toporov – Soviet linguist.

V. K. Trediakovsky (1703–1769) – a mediocre court poet. He tried his hand at history.

Turold (12th century) – a minstrel, author of *The Song of Roland*.

Fakhr ad-Din Mubarakshah Marvarruudi (13th century) – a Persian historian.

Theodosius of the Caves (d. 1074) – an Old Russian writer and abbot of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra.

Theophylact Simocatta (late 6th–7th centuries) – Eastern Roman historian and chronicler.

Photius (820–897) – Patriarch of Constantinople.

Froyanov, I.Y. (born 1936) – a contemporary Russian scholar.

G.K. Chesterton (1874–1936) – British Catholic thinker, writer and journalist.

Schletzer, A.L. (1735–1809) – a German scholar who worked in Russia for a time. He is regarded as one of the founders of the 'Norman theory'.

Al-Nadim (10th century) – an Arab historian and geographer.

Julian (13th century) – a Hungarian Dominican monk who travelled throughout Eastern Europe prior to the Mongol invasion in search of the ancestral homeland of his people – Greater Hungary.

2. Historical figures, both real and legendary

Aaron bar Benjamin (10th century) – Khagan-bek of Khazaria. Agapit (12th century) – a monk of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra.

Adalbert of Trier (Magdeburg) (d. 981) – German ecclesiastical and political figure.

Alexander the Great (Iskander) (356–323 BC) – King of Macedonia. Military commander and statesman. Founder of the short-lived Macedonian empire.

Alexander Peresvet (d. 1380) – a boyar from Bryansk, a hero of the Battle of Kulikovo. He was never a monk.

Ali ibn al-Gaitam (d. 912) – Shirvanshah. In 909, he destroyed a caravan of Russian merchants. In 912, he was killed by the Rus'.

Al-Muktaadir (10th century) – a caliph. He was notorious for his drunkenness and dissolute lifestyle.

Amand (7th century) – a bishop. He tried unsuccessfully to preach Christianity to the Slavs.

Andrew the First-Called, the Martyr – an apostle. He travelled, most likely along the Danube, through the lands that would later be inhabited by the Rugians and Rus'. The legend of his travels with them spread to Eastern Europe.

Anthony the Roman (d. 1147) – a saint who sailed to Novgorod on a rock.

Arius (d. 336) – a priest from Alexandria in Egypt, founder of Arianism.

Arthur (5th century), leg. – a legendary king of the Britons, victor over the Anglo-Saxons, who posthumously became a symbol of Anglo-Saxon civilisation.

Askold (d. 882) – one of the princely brothers who ruled in Kyiv. He was baptised in Constantinople. He was executed by Oleg the Prophet.

Attila, the Scourge of God (d. 453) – leader of the Huns. Under his rule, the Hun tribal confederation reached the height of its power. It disintegrated after his death.

Ahmad ibn Kuyya (10th century) – a vizier and commander of the Muslim mercenaries of Khazaria. He had no connection whatsoever with the founding of Kyiv, nor did his obscure father.

Bald (Balid) (10th century) – a retainer of Maimun, the Emir of Derbent, Rus
sian Barjil (8th century) – a Khazar general who won the battle
at Ardabil.

Bravlin (8th century) – a prince of the Rus', who led a campaign against the Byzantine possessions in Crimea.

Buga the Elder (9th century) – an Arab commander who led a punitive expedition in the Transcaucasus in the 40s of the 9th century.

Bulan (8th century) – a khagan-bek of pagan Khazaria, who married a Jewish woman named Serach and converted to Judaism.

Bus (Bos, Baksan) (d. 375) – an Ant prince. He was taken captive and brutally murdered by Vinitar, the king of the Goths.

Vasily Buslaev, formerly – a brave warrior from Novgorod.

Vasilisa Mikulichna, formerly – a female warrior (Polyanitsa).

Veinemainen (Veineleynen), legendary – a cultural hero of the Karelian-epic, eponym of the Russians (?).

Belisarius (505–565) – a general under Justinian the Great. He suppressed the 'Nika' revolt and fought against the Persians, Goths and Vandals.

Vercingetorix (d. 46 BC) – a Gaul, leader of the revolt against the Romans.

Vinitar (d. 375) – a Gothic king of the Amali clan. He brutally murdered the Ants' prince Bus, whom he had taken captive, along with his sons and

elders.

Vladimir Vsevolodovich Monomakh (1053–1125) – Grand Prince of Kyiv. Legislator, politician, diplomat and military commander.

Vladimir Svyatoslavich the Baptist (d. 1015) – son of Grand Prince Svyatoslav by the Khazar slave woman Malki. Usurper of the throne, murderer of his paternal brother, the rightful heir, Yaropolk Svyatoslavich. Apostate.

George Chula (d. 1014) – a baptised Khazar who led a rebellion in the Crimean provinces of Byzantium.

Germanarich (4th century) – a Gothic king of the Amali clan. He committed suicide, having failed to resist the Huns.

David – King of Judah. He was the first to use ‘furnaces’ to destroy prisoners (2 Kings 12:31) – several thousand years before Auschwitz.

Darius I the Great (d. 486 BC) – king of the Persian Achaemenid Empire.

Dir (d. 882) – one of the princely brothers who ruled in Kyiv. Dnipro Korolevychna – a female warrior (Polyanitsa).

Jarrah (d. 730) – an Arab commander who lost the Battle of Ardabil.

Danube, formerly – a mighty warrior, husband and murderer of Princess Dnepra.
He took his own life.

Hezekiah (8th century) – a khagan-bek, son of Obadiah.

Zopirion (4th century to BC) – a general of Alexander the Great.

Ibn Samun (10th century) – a Christian from Berdaa.

Igor Rurikovich (Son of the Falcon) (d. 945) – Grand Prince of Kyiv. Victor over the Drevlians, Ulichs, Pechenegs and Greeks. – 53, 54, 114, 141, 142, 162–173, 214, 215.

Igor Svyatoslavich (1150–1202) – Prince of Novgorod-Seversky from 1178, and of Chernihiv from 1199. A descendant of Oleg Svyatoslavich,

organiser of the unsuccessful campaign against the Polovtsians in 1185. The main character
of *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*.

Idanfirs (6th century BC) – leader of the Scythians.

John of Gothia – bishop, leader of the of Christians against Khazar rule in Crimea. – 104.

Joseph bar Aaron (10th century) – the last khagan-bek of Khazaria, author of a letter to Hasdai ibn Shaprut.

Yezdegerd III (d. 625) – the last shah of Zoroastrian Iran.

Callinicus (7th century) – a Greek, inventor of 'Greek fire'.

Charlemagne (742–814) – King of the Franks from 768, Emperor from 800, founder of the Frankish Empire.

Kiy (Kuar), the Wise – a Polyan prince, founder of Kyiv, brother of Shchek and Khoriv.

Cyrus (d. 529 BC) – King of the Persians, founder of the Achaemenid Empire.

Cyril-Constantine (827–869) – Greek preacher,
'enlightener' of the Slavs, translator of the Bible and liturgical texts into the Slavic language. Inventor of the 'Slavic script' – Glagolitic. He has no connection whatsoever with the so-called Cyrillic alphabet.

Canute the Great (d. 1035) – King of Denmark, England, Norway and southern Sweden. He contributed to the establishment of Christianity in Denmark.

Columbanus (6th century), a saint and preacher of Christianity. His mission among the Slavs was unsuccessful.

Constantine the Great (d. 337) – Roman Emperor from 306, founder of Constantinople (330), the first Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire to make Christianity the state religion.

Constantine V Copronymus (741–775) – Eastern Roman emperor. He supported the iconoclastic movement.

Konchak (second half of the 12th century) – a Polovtsian khan of the Sharukanid dynasty.

Kopola – a Georgian deity of fertility. Kupala – a
Russian god of 'earthly fruits'.

Lavrita (Lavristan) (6th century) – a leader of the Danubian Slavs, killed by the Avars.

Lyudota (late 10th century) – a Russian blacksmith and armourer.

Lyutover (Ilitver) (8th century?) – chieftain of the ‘Savirs’ – the northerners. He was baptised in the hope of securing the aid of the Orthodox Caesar and the new god in the struggle against the Khazars, but suffered a crushing defeat.

Mazdak (d. 528) – founder of a heretical, ‘proto-communist’ doctrine.

Maimun ibn Ahmad ibn Abd al-Malik (10th century) – emir of Derbent. Manassiah (8th century) – khagan-bek, grandson of Obadiah.

Marzuban ibn Muhammad (10th century) – ruler of Berdaa, a Deylamite highlander by origin.

Mezanmir Idarich (Maremikho, son of Idar) (6th century) – chieftain of the Ants, ambassador to the Avars, killed by them.

Mervan ibn Muhammad, the Merciless (d. 749) – an Arab military commander from the ruling Umayyad dynasty, later Caliph.

Mikhail Kazarin, formerly – a bogatyr.

Muhammad (570–632) – founder of Islam. ‘The Prophet’, or more precisely, the Messenger (Rasul) of Allah.

Musa al-Tusi (late 10th century) – a fanatical Islamic preacher from Gilan. He was a pawn in the Shirvan intrigues in Derbent.

Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Azdī (d. 992) – a Shirvanshah. He initially acted as a mediator between the Khazar refugees and the Russian conquerors in the North Caucasus, then plotted against Derbent, which was allied with the Rus. – 182, 194, 195, 200–204, 208–210.

Muhammad ibn Mervan (7th century) – Emir of Mesopotamia, Arab military commander.

Narzes (6th century) – a general under Justinian the Great, who fought against the Goths in Italy. Of Armenian origin, he was a eunuch.

Nastasia Mikulichna, was. – a female hero (Polyanitsa). Wife of Dobrynya Nikitich.

Nebul (7th century) – a Slavic chieftain, a captive of of Justinian II, defected to the Arabs.

Afanasy Nikitin (d. 1472) – the first merchant from Christian Rus' to visit India, to which the pagan Rus' people sailed regularly in the mid-9th century. Author of *The Journey Beyond the Three Seas*.

Obadiah (8th century) – the third Jewish khagan-bek of Khazaria, who established Judaism as the state religion.

Olav Alvkonung – a ruler of Sweden from the Yngling dynasty during the Great Migration.

Oleg the Prophet (d. 912) – the greatest figure of the Russian Middle Ages. Grand Prince of Kyiv. The de facto founder of the Rus' state. He united Kyiv and Novgorod. He subdued the Drevlians. Victor over the Khazars, he freed the Slavic peoples—the Vyatichi, Radimichi and Severians—from tribute.

Oleg Svyatoslavich (Gorislavich) (d. 1115) – Prince of Chernigov and Tmutarakan. An adventurer, a man of complex fate, and a political opponent of Vladimir Monomakh.

Olga (Allogia, Helena) (d. 969) – wife of Igor Rurikovich, Grand Prince of Kyiv. Ruler from 945 to 962. Contrary to a widespread misconception, she showed no statesmanship whatsoever, vacillating between the Byzantine Empire and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Her reign was marked by a decline in Rus's foreign activity, the loss of certain territories, and a fall in the international prestige of the Rus' state; it would have led to the occupation of the country had it not been for Sviatoslav, who removed his mother from power.

Otto I (912–973) – King of the Germans from 936, and the first Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation from 962. Under his rule, the advance into Slavic lands ('Drang nach Osten') intensified significantly.

Partatu (7th century BC) – a Scythian chieftain.

Perun – the supreme god of thunder among the Slavs and Rus'.

Piryo (Piryon-padchak), likely – Perun in Chechen legends.

Pesach, fictional – a character in a forged Cambridge document, a Khazar commander who allegedly defeated the 'King of the Rus' X-l-gv.

Pretich (10th century) – ruler of the northerners.

Ras-Tarkhan – khagan-bek of Khazaria, son of Bulan.

Roger (Rodgeir) (d. 1154) – Duke (Jarl), later King (Konung) of the Sicilian Normans.

Rurik Godislavich (d. c. 879?) – prince of the Obodrites and Rus', summoned by the Slavs of northern Eastern Europe to quell internal strife and provide defence against the Khazars. Father (?) of Igor.

Saak (d. 840) – ruler (emir) of Tiflis.

Sveneld (10th century) – voivode to the Grand Princes of Kyiv: Igor Rurikovich, Sviatoslav Igorevich and Yaropolk Sviatoslavich.

Sviatoslav I the Brave Igorevich (942–972) – the greatest figure of the Russian Middle Ages. Grand Prince of Kyiv. A military commander and statesman. He destroyed the Khazar Khaganate. He expanded the borders of Rus' as far as the Volga. He conquered Bulgaria, proclaiming his aim to create a pan-Slavic state. He was killed by the Pechenegs at the instigation of the Byzantines and the Christians of Kyiv.

Severin (d. 482) – a saint. A preacher of Christianity amongst the Danubian Rus-Rugs.

Sela, Leg – the thunderer in Vainakh mythology.

Selim II Mast (the Drunkard) (1566–1574) – Turkish sultan.

Serakh (8th century) – daughter of the elder of the Rakhdonites, wife of Kagan-Bek Bulan.

Slavimir (10th century) – a blacksmith and armourer.

Solnoslav (8th century) – a Slavic chieftain who took part in the civil war in the Arab Caliphate.

Sfengo (?) (10th–11th centuries) – prince of Tmutorokan, son of Svyatoslav.

Theodoric (493–526) – king of the Eastern Goths (Ostrogoths).

Thor – the Norse god of thunder.

Tuzun (d. 945) – emir of Persia. Umar II

(d. 720) – caliph.

Theodosius (d. 840) – Prince of the Abkhazians.

Hanukka (8th century) – khagan-bek, brother and heir of Obadiah.

Harald Hardrada (d. 1066) – konung of the Norwegians.

Harald Gillekrist (d. 1136) – konung of the Norwegians and Swedes. He took part in a crusade and fought against the pagans in his own country.

Hasdai ibn Shafrut (10th century) – vizier to the Caliph of Córdoba, a Jew, and the recipient of a letter from Kagan-Bek Joseph.

Hisham (8th century) – Caliph of Baghdad.

Kh-l-gv, fictional – a character in a forged Cambridge document, a tsar of the Rus' who attacked Khazaria at the instigation of Byzantium, was defeated by the Khazar Pesach and forced by him to attack Byzantium. As a result, he perished in Persia.

Khoriv (Khoravan, Khoriv), legendary – the younger brother of Prince Kiy, the founder of Kyiv.

Khosrow Anushirvan (Khosrow of Persia) – ruler (shah) of Persia from 531, of the Sassanid dynasty.

Khurzad (d. 712) – leader of the Mazdakite uprising in Khorezm.

Chichak – a Khazar princess, married to Constantine V Copronymus.

Caesar, Gaius Julius (100–44 BC) – Roman general, statesman and writer.

Sharukan (d. 1107) – a Polovtsian khan. He was taken prisoner and executed by the Russian princes.

Shahriyar (7th century) – ruler of Derbent.

Shchek (Meltei), the Younger – the younger brother of Prince Kyi, the founder of Kyiv.

Erik Eyjógur (12th century) – a pilgrim king who undertook a journey to the Holy Land.

Judith – wife of the king, later Empress of Otto.

Justinian I the Great (482–565) – Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire. He waged wars in Italy against the Goths, in the Danube region against the Slavs, and in the east against the Persians.

Justinian II – Byzantine emperor.

Yaroslav Vladimirovich the Wise (978–1054) – Prince of Novgorod, and from 1025 Grand Prince of Kyiv.

Index of geographical names and names of peoples

Abeskun – an island in the Caspian Sea.

The Abesku Sea – a medieval name for the Caspian Sea.

The Avars (Obry) were a nomadic Turkic people. In the 7th century, they destroyed the tribal confederation of the Ants. They established the Avar Khaganate in Central Europe.

Agvan – a historical region in present-day Azerbaijan, with its capital at Berdaa (Partava).

The Adyghe – also known as the Kasogs – are an ethnic group in the North Caucasus. Azerbaijan – a historical region in the eastern part Transcaucasia.

The Sea of Azov is connected to the Black Sea by the Kerch Strait. The Alans are an ethnic group in the North Caucasus. They are descendants of the Scythians and Sarmatians, the ancestors of the Ossetians.

Amazons, legendary – a tribe of female warriors.

England – a kingdom in the British Isles.

Anglo-Saxons – a group of North Germanic tribes. Their descendants are the English and the Americans.

The Ants – one of the three Slavic groups, alongside the Slovenes-Slavs proper and the Venedi. They lived from the mouth of the Danube to the Don and the Meotida.

Arabs – a group of peoples currently inhabiting the Near East and North Africa. Originally, they were nomads of the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula.

Ardebil – a region and city on the south-western coast of the Caspian Sea, in Southern Azerbaijan. Now located in northern Iran.

Armenians – (self-designation: hay) – the oldest people of the Transcaucasus. According to some theories, they are descendants of the Hittites. Their language is Indo-European. Their religion is Christianity in its Monophysite (Gregorian) form.

Arsania (Artania, Urtab) – one of the three ‘cities’, ‘groups’ or ‘kingdoms’ of the Rus mentioned by Eastern authors. Its exact location has not been established.

Baghdad – a city on the River Tigris, the capital of the Arab Caliphate.

Badon, lit. – a mountain in Britain, the site of King Arthur's first battle.

The Balkans – a peninsula in south-eastern Europe.

The Baltic Sea – a part of the Atlantic Ocean that extends deep into the European mainland. It is connected to the North Sea via the Øresund Strait and the Great and Little Belts.

The Balts – a group of peoples. Those still in existence today are the Lithuanians and Latvians. Those that have disappeared are the Prussians, Yotvingians, Golyads and Merya (?).

The Barsils were one of the tribes in the North Caucasus at the dawn of the Khazar Khaganate.

Belaya Vezha – a Russian town on the site of the Khazar town of Sarkel. Berdaa – also known as Partava, now Barda in Azerbaijan.

Birka – a trading centre in Sweden during the 'Viking Age'.

Bulgaria – a state in the northern part of the Balkan Peninsula.

The Bulgarians – originally a Turkic-Sarmatian tribe that roamed the Don region and, following their defeat by the Khazars, moved to the Danube, where they intermingled with the Slavs. Subsequently, the term came to refer to the entire population of Bulgaria.

Borodino – a village near Moscow, the site of the decisive battle of the Patriotic War of 1812.

Bosporus Cimmerian – the ancient name for Kerch and the Kerch Strait.

Bulgaria – a state founded by the Bulgars on the Upper Volga and Kama rivers.

The Bulgars – a branch of the Bulgarians (Volga Bulgars) who fled northwards from the Khazars to the Kama region and settled there.

The Burtas – a Ugric (related to the Hungarians) nomadic tribe.
It is thought to form the basis of the Bashkirs' origins.

Buyan, lit. – a mythical island from Russian folklore. According to one account, its prototype is Ruyan-Rügen.

Varangians – originally the name for the Obodrites; it subsequently came to be applied to all the Baltic Slavs and, finally, to all the tribes and peoples of the Baltic region. They were never a 'collective term for the Scandinavian peoples' and have little connection to the Vikings or the Normans.

The Varangian Sea is the Russian name for the Baltic Sea.

The Velets – also known as the Lyutichs – were one of the most powerful tribal principalities of the Baltic Slavs. They lived between the territory of the Obodrites and the Oder.

The Hungarians – also known as the Ugrians or Magyars. Originally nomads in the Black Sea region, they later migrated to the Danube, where they 'found their homeland'.

The Venedi (Veneti, Wends) – an ancient people, the ancestors of the Slavs, Germanic peoples and Celts. Subsequently, the name was applied mainly to the Slavs.

Venice – a city on the Adriatic coast of Italy.

Byzantium (the Eastern Roman Empire, the Second Rome) – a state that emerged in the eastern part of the Roman Empire following its collapse. Byzantium is the scholarly name for the country, coined by Renaissance scholars. The inhabitants themselves called themselves Romans, and their country the Roman Empire.

Vitebsk is a city on the Western Dvina.

The Volga is a river that rises in the Valdai Uplands and, as is well known, flows into the Caspian Sea.

Volok Lamsky is a town on the Volga–Baltic trade route. The Volkhov is a river in north-western Russia, flowing into Lake Ilmen.

Volyn – 'the largest city in Europe' (Adam of Bremen), a religious, commercial and political centre of the Baltic Slavs (Pomors) at the mouth of the Oder.

The Vyatichi – one of the 'lands' of the Eastern Slavs. The name derives from the legendary founding prince Vyatko, brother (?) of Radim, who came with his clan from Poland. It was situated in the Oka basin. Its capital was Kordno, and its religious centre was Dedoslavl.

Gaugamela – the site of the decisive battle between Alexander the Great and the armies of Darius III.

The Gauls – Celtic tribes who inhabited the territory of modern-day France.

Heliopolis – a Greek city in Asia Minor, the site of the invention of 'Greek fire'.

Gilan – a region on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea.

The Hyrcanian Sea – the ancient name for the Caspian Sea.

Gotland – an island in the Baltic Sea.

The Goths – a North Germanic tribe which, in the 2nd–3rd centuries, migrated from the shores of the Baltic Sea to the northern Black Sea region, and subsequently moved into the territories of the Roman Empire.

Greeks – a Slavic (of Roman origin) name for the Byzantines.

Georgians – a people in the north-western and central parts of the Transcaucasus.

Grunwald – a town in Poland. The site of the decisive battle between the combined Russian-Lithuanian-Polish forces and the forces of the Teutonic Order in 1410.

Huns – a tribe of uncertain, most likely Turkic, origin.
First mentioned in 375.

Denmark – a country on the Jutland Peninsula.

Dagestan – a historical region between the Main Caucasus Range and the Caspian Sea.

The Daryal Gorge – one of the routes between the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia. The course of the River Terek.

Deilem – mountains to the south of the Caspian Sea.

The Deylemites – mountain tribes who inhabited Deylem.

Derbent (al-Bab, Bab-ul-Abwab) – a fortified town built by Khosrow Anushirvan to defend against raids from the north, situated where the Caucasus Mountains meet the Caspian Sea.

Desna – a left-bank tributary of the Dnieper in its middle course.

Jurjan – the Arabic name for ancient Hyrcania. A region to the south-east of the Caspian Sea.

The Dnieper is a river that flows from the Valdai Uplands into the Black Sea.

The Don is a river that rises in the Moscow Region and flows into the Sea of Azov.

The Drevlyans were one of the ‘principalities’ of the Eastern Slavs, situated between the Goryn, Irpen and Pripyat rivers. Their capital was Iskorosten.

The Dregovichians were one of the ‘principalities’ of the Eastern Slavs, situated between the Western Dvina and the Pripyat. Their capital was Turov.

Duluk – a town in Syria with a Slavic garrison. The

Danube – the longest river in Europe.

The Jews – a Semitic people.

Egypt – a country in eastern North Africa.

Transcaucasia – the part of the Caucasus south of the Main Caucasian Range. Ilmen – a lake in the north of the Russian Plain. The name was evidently brought from the west by Obodrite colonists – the Ilmen Slavs – and is derived from the river Ilmenau or Ilmer, the name of the Zeiderzee bay.

India – a country in southern Asia.

Iran – a country in South-West Asia, between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf.

Iranians – the population of Iran or a group of peoples which, alongside them, includes Ossetians, Tajiks and Afghans, as well as the extinct peoples of the Scythians, Saka, Massagetae, Sarmatians and the pre-Islamic population of Central Asia.

Spain is a peninsula and a country in the far south-west of Europe.

Italy – a peninsula in southern Europe.

Itil (Atil) – a city, the capital of the Khazar Khaganate following the victory of the Jewish faction in the civil war. Its location is unknown. Somewhere in the lower reaches of the Volga, possibly in its delta.

Itil (Atil) – a river. The Turkic name for the Volga.

Kadesh – the site of the battle between Ramses II and the Hittites.

Kazan – the capital of the Kazan Khanate (captured by Russian troops in 1552) and of modern-day Tatarstan.

Cairo – the capital of Muslim Egypt.

California – a peninsula on the west coast of the USA. Kasogi – the Old Russian name for the Adyghe people.

Kakheti – a region in Georgia on the border with Armenia.

The Celts – a group of peoples which currently includes the Irish, the Welsh and the Scottish Gaels in Britain, as well as the Bretons in France. They previously inhabited territories in what are now France (the Gauls), Belgium (the Belgae), the Netherlands, Austria and the Czech Republic (the Boii).

Kemlik – the residence of the Khazar khagans. It was built of red brick. The name is thought to derive from the ancient Hebrew for ‘house of the king’.

Kyiv – a city on the Dnieper, opposite the mouth of the Desna. The capital of the Polans; from 882, the capital of Kievan Rus’.

The Cimbri – a Celtic or Germanic tribe, originally inhabiting the Danish region of Himmerland. They raided Rome in the 2nd century BC.

The Cimmerians were a nomadic people of the Northern Black Sea region. In the 8th–7th centuries BC, they were driven out by the Scythians into the Near East. They may have been related to the Cimbri.

China – the largest country in the Far East.

Constantinople (Byzantium, Tsargrad) – the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Córdoba – a city in Spain, the capital during the period of Arab rule.

Korsun – the Russian name for Chersonesos Taurica.

The Krivichs – one of the ‘principalities’ of the Eastern Slavs. They inhabited the lands around Pskov, Polotsk, Smolensk and Rostov. The name is thought to derive from the Baltic word ‘krive’ – meaning ‘priest’.

Crimea – a peninsula separating the Sea of Azov from the Black Sea.

Ctesiphon – the capital of Sassanid (pre-Islamic) Iran.

Kumis – a region in Persia, near modern-day Tehran. Kura – a river in the Caucasus.

Ladoga – a town in Volkhov, the original capital of the Ilmen Slavs and Rurik.

Latvia – a country in the Baltic region.

The Lezgins are an ethnic group in the North Caucasus. The ancestors of the Lezgins. Lyon is a city in France.

Lithuania is a country in the Baltic region. London is the capital of England.

The Land of Lyakhovitsa (Politovskaya) – the epic name for Poland.

Magyars – the self-designation of the Hungarians.

Mazandaran – a province in Iran, bordering the southern shores of the Caspian Sea.

Maraga – a town in Southern Azerbaijan, on the shores of Lake Urmia. Now known as the city of Meraguh in Iran.

Marash – now known as Kahramanmaraş in Turkey. A town with a Slavic garrison in the service of the Arab caliphs.

Mashhad – a city south of Derbent and north of Shirvan. Meotida – the ancient name for the Sea of Azov.

Merv – a city in Central Asia. Minsk – a city on the Svisloch.

Mongols – an ethnic group in Central Asia. Moravia – a region in Central Europe.

Mubaraki – a small settlement on the banks of the Kura near Berdaa, the site of the Rus' camp in 944–945.

The Neva is a river connecting Lake Ladoga with the Baltic Sea.

Germans – a Slavic name for the Germanic peoples, which later came to refer to Western foreigners in general. It does not derive from 'nemota', but from the name of the Germanic tribe the Nemeti.

Nizhny Volochok – an ancient town on the Baltic–Volga trade route.

Nograd – a town on the Danube.

Novgorod on the Volkhov – the second capital of the Ilmen Slavs, and later of the Veche-ruled Novgorod Republic. The most robust, independent and powerful Russian city-state.

Novgorod-Seversky – a town on the Desna; from 1096, the capital of the appanage principality of Novgorod-Seversky.

Novigrad – a city on the Danube.

The Normans – a collective term for the Scandinavian Germanic-speaking tribes. Derived from the self-designation of the Norwegians, which became widespread amongst the victims of their raids on other tribes in Scandinavia.

The Obodrites (Rerici, Rurici) were one of the largest and most powerful principalities of the Slavic Baltic region ('Varangian Pomerania'). Its capital was Rerik (modern-day Mecklenburg). See also the Varangians. They lived in the lower reaches of the Elbe (Labe), mainly on the right bank.

Palestine – a country in the Middle East.

Paris – the capital of France.

Partava – the Armenian name for Berdaa.

The Pechenegs – a Turkic confederation of tribes that appeared on the steppe border of Rus' in 912. According to some theories, the Gagauz people of modern-day Moldova are their descendants.

Persia – the historical name for the ancient and medieval states of Iran.

Poltava – a city in Ukraine. The site of the victorious battle on 29 June 1709.

The Polans – an East Slavic 'principality' in the Middle Dnieper region. Towns: Kyiv (capital), Rodnya (a religious centre?).

The Varangian Pomorje – the lands of modern-day northern Germany, on the southern shore of the Baltic Sea. It was settled by the Baltic Slavs, the Varangians, and subsequently partially exterminated, partly assimilated by the German conquerors.

The right-bank Tsimlyansk fort – the ruins of a fortress belonging to the pagan Khazars, whose population was completely exterminated by the conquering forces of the khagan-bek, the Jew Obadiah.

The Radimichs – one of the East Slavic 'principalities', situated between the Dnieper and the Sozh. It was named after the chieftain Radim, the brother (or namesake?) of Vyatko, who came with his clan from Polish lands. Its capital was, apparently, Gomiy (modern-day Gomel).

Ray – a city in Iran, not far from modern-day Tehran.

Rome – a city in Italy, the capital of the Roman Republic and later the Roman Empire.

Romans – the people of Rome.

Romans – 'Romans', the self-designation of the inhabitants of the Eastern Roman Empire, Byzantium.

Roncesvalles – a pass in the Pyrenees where an unequal battle took place between Count Roland's retinue and the Saracens.

Rugi – the Germanic-Latin name for the Rus'.

Rugiland – the name for Danubian Rus' in Latin-language Germanic literature of the Middle Ages.

Rusaramarca – the name for Danube Rus' in medieval Germanic trade documents.

The Rus Sea – the Rus and Arabic name for the Black Sea from the 10th century onwards.

Rügen (Ruyan) – an island in the Baltic Sea off the northern coast of Germany. The main religious centre of the Slavs. It is also the ‘island of the Rus’ mentioned in medieval Arabic sources. It may also be the ‘Buyan’ of Russian folklore.

The Savirs – a North Caucasian tribe of Turkic or Scythian-Sarmatian origin.

The Sanarians (Cenars) – an ethnic group in the Caucasus who lived in the Daryal Gorge region.

Sari – a town on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea.

Sarkel – ‘White Fortress’, the main military stronghold of the Khazar Khaganate and a base for raids on Slavic lands. It was built by the Byzantine architect Petronas Kamatir.

The Sarmatians – an Iranian-speaking nomadic tribe of the Northern Black Sea region, who displaced the Scythians.

The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation – a state founded in 962 by King Otto of the Saxon dynasty, ruler of the East Frankish (German) Kingdom. It pursued an aggressive policy towards its neighbours, primarily the Polabian and Baltic Slavs (Varangians) – the ‘Drang nach Osten’.

Sevastopol – a city in Asia Minor, now known as Sulu-Saray in Turkey.

The Severians – an East Slavic ‘principality’ situated on the banks of the Desna, Seim, Sula and Seversky Donets rivers.

Seville – a city in Spain.

Semender – a city on the Dagestan coast of the Caspian Sea.
The pagan capital of Khazaria.

The Semikarakor fortified settlement – the ruins of a fortress belonging to the pagan Khazars, whose population was completely exterminated by the mercenary troops of the Khagan-Bek, the Jew Obadiah, who had captured it.

Siberia – the part of Asia stretching from the Urals to the watershed ranges of the Pacific coast in the east.

Syria – a country on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Sicily – an island off the southern coast of Italy.

Scandinavia – a peninsula in northern Europe.

Scandinavians – a group of North Germanic peoples inhabiting Scandinavia, the Jutland Peninsula and Iceland. See also Normans.

The Scythians – a collective term for the tribes of the Northern Black Sea region in antiquity and prior to the Sarmatian invasion. They were predominantly Iranian-speaking nomads.

The Ilmen Slovenes – an East Slavic ‘principality’ in the north of Eastern Europe. Its capital was Ladoga, and later Novgorod. They were descendants of Obodrite (Varangian) colonists.

The Slovenes – a Slavic people in Central Europe. Smolensk

– a town on the upper reaches of the Dnieper.

The Mediterranean Sea – the sea between Europe and Africa.

Central Asia – the part of Asia between the Caspian and Aral Seas.

Surozh – a town on the shores of the Sea of Azov (now Sudak). Russian since the 10th century.

The Surozh Sea – the Russian name for the Sea of Azov.

Tabaristan – a region in the Northern Ciscaucasia near Derbent.

The Teutons – a Germanic tribe.

The Tiverians – an East Slavic ‘principality’ between the Dniester and the mouth of the Danube. Its capital was the town of Cherny.

Tiflis – the old name for Tbilisi.

Tmutorokan (Matrega, Matrika, Tamatarha, Samkush, incorrectly rendered as Tmutarakan) – a city on the site of present-day Taman.

Turks – in the narrow sense – the tribe that established the Turkic Khaganate in Central and North-Eastern Asia in the 6th–8th centuries. In a broader sense, they refer to a group of linguistically and culturally related tribes and peoples (Turkmens, Guz, Pechenegs, Azerbaijanis, Turks, Gagauz, Polovtsians, Tatars, Kazakhs, etc.).

Ulichi – an East Slavic ‘principality’ between the Dnieper and the Southern Bug. Capital – Peresechen.

Uppsala – a cult andpolitical centre of Sweden ‘Viking Age’.

The Finns are a group of tribes and ethnic groups in northern and eastern Europe.

The Franks – a Germanic tribe that lived along the Rhine and conquered Gaul.

The Khazars – a Turkic tribe in the North Caucasus, founders of the Khazar Khaganate.

Khazran – a town on the Volga, south of Bulgar and north of Itil.
It was destroyed by Grand Prince Svyatoslav Igorevich.

The Khvalyn Sea – the Russian name for the Caspian Sea.

Hedeby – one of the largest centres of Scandinavian craftsmanship and trade during the 'Viking Age'. According to the general consensus of Arab merchants and Western missionaries, it was a desolate and dreary place.

Chersonesos Taurica – an ancient city in Crimea, not far from modern-day Sevastopol.

Khorezm – an ancient state in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya River.

Tsargrad – the Russian name for Constantinople.

Cherkasy – a city on the Dnieper.

Chernihiv – a city on the Desna. The capital of the northerners.

The Black Sea – an inland sea between Europe and Asia Minor. Chud – the Russian name for Estonians.

The Swedes are a Scandinavian people living in the south-east of the Scandinavian Peninsula.

Sweden is the Swedish state.

The Shelon is a river that flows into Lake Ilmen.

Shipka is a mountain pass in Bulgaria. During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, Russian troops captured this pass and held it for six months. In January 1878, Russian troops went on the offensive and drove the Turks out of Bulgaria.

Shirvan – a state on the Absheron Peninsula and the adjacent coastline. Its capital is Shemakha.

Svalbard – an archipelago in the Arctic Ocean. Estonia – a

country in the Baltic region.

Japan – a country comprising the islands of Hokkaido, Honshu, Kyushu and Shikoku in the Pacific Ocean.

Iași – the ancient Rus' settlement of Iasky Torg, a city in north-eastern Romania.

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notes

Notes

1

Shintoism, Shinto – the oldest indigenous religion of the Land of the Rising Sun, Japanese paganism. Like any form of paganism, it consists of the worship of nature deities and ancestors.

2

In the book *Svyatoslav*, I explain in detail why, following many scholars, I consider the so-called Cyrillic alphabet to be the successor to precisely these ‘Russian scripts’, and Cyril to be the inventor of the Glagolitic alphabet.

3

Incidentally, I am not joking. A certain V. Shnirelman claimed not long ago that those who deny the existence of human sacrifice amongst the ancient Slavs are thereby implying that such sacrifices exist amongst the Jews. What logic! And yet the gentleman who said this is not in a mental asylum, but lectures at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in Moscow, holding a PhD.

4

B.A. Rybakov saw this Scythian chieftain as a Proto-Slavic ‘skolot’, reconstructing his name as Perepet, but alas – there is far too little evidence for this.

5

As in *Svyatoslav*, I shall have to devote a great deal of space and time in this book to the so-called ‘Norman theory’. Well, firstly, I cannot hope to drown out the barrage of Normanist propaganda in a single go. And secondly – what can one do, when literally every page of our ancient history cries out against this three-hundred-year-old mummy, which continues, without any right whatsoever, to sit enthroned on the altar of the temple of Russian history!

6

The author is working on a book entitled *The Times of the Bylinas*.

7

Of course, one would like to think that such utter nonsense belongs to the days of Schletzer and Co., but alas, one need only recall the film
'The 13th Warrior'. In case anyone hasn't realised, the vicious Wendel monsters – those garishly painted cave-dwelling cannibals with stone axes, clad in bearskins, who tormented the unfortunate Scandinavians with their raids – are the Wends, as the medieval Germans and Scandinavians called the Slavs.

8

It is curious, however, that according to tradition, Andrew, for some reason, DID NOT PREACH on his journey across the Russian plains, which seriously undermines the theory that this legend was originally fabricated with the aim of 'antiquising' Russian Christianity. This question also occupied medieval Orthodox authors; for example, one of the greatest ideologues of the Russian Orthodox Church, Hegumen Joseph of Volotsk, posed the same question and replied: 'he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit'. Unfortunately, whilst the 'Holy Spirit' forbade Andrew from preaching, it did not forbid certain irresponsible individuals, 'zealous beyond reason', as they used to say in Joseph Volotsky's day, from composing tales about the Apostle's preaching in Russia, about converted pagans and even the Magi, who with their own hands overthrew 'idols'. And this is published not just anywhere, but in the *Encyclopaedia of Errors*, volume
'Religion'. And here I was under the impression that the aim of this series was to dispel misconceptions, not to multiply them.

9

I cannot resist, incidentally, pointing out just how strong the memory of their origins was amongst the TRUE descendants of the Normans. Roger-Rodgeir's ancestors came to Italy not even from Norway, but merely from French Normandy a hundred years before Harald, and had arrived in Normandy from the Scandinavian lands even earlier – two centuries before their resettlement in Sicily. Alexander Nevsky, on the other hand, showed not the slightest sense of kinship towards his Swedish guests – to be fair, it should be noted that the Swedes, too, showed no recollection of any mythical 'kinship' with the descendants of Rurik.

10

On the other hand: given when Polynesian legends began to be recorded – who knows, perhaps some runaway or shipwrecked Russian sailor, originally from a peasant background, really did frighten the chocolate-skinned lads with horror stories about undead creatures that steal children.

11

In literature, this ancient Russian city has been saddled with the absurd and awkward name ‘Tmutarakan’. It has reached the point of absurdity – the memorial stone erected by Prince Gleb Svyatoslavich is called the ‘Tmutarakan Stone’, even though it is clearly inscribed with
‘Tmutorokan’ – with no hint whatsoever of swarms of harmful insects!

12

More than anything, these groups of subjects of the Second Rome resembled modern-day football fans – with the difference that they possessed a scale and influence that forced even autocratic emperors to reckon with them.

13

Incidentally, in the mouths of genuine medieval Scandinavians, the word ‘Viking’ was by no means a compliment. A Scandinavian of that era, upon hearing that his time would be called the ‘Viking Age’, would most likely have taken serious offence – just as a law-abiding American of the 1920s would have taken offence if someone had called America the ‘land of gangsters’ or his era the ‘gangster era’.

For example, in Eastern Europe, on the lands of what would become Rus', the clans descended from the chieftains Radim and Vyatko gave their names to the Radimich and Vyatich peoples, whilst the Dregovich, Buzhans and Drevlyans were named after their habitats: 'drygve' – the marshes, the banks of the River Bug and the forests.

15

The origin of the name ‘Ants’ itself remains a mystery to researchers. To date, there are three possible answers to this complex question, three theories. The first, the ‘Hunnic’ theory, derives
‘ant’ from the Mongolian ‘anda’ – meaning ‘brother-in-arms’. It is well known that the Ants were allies of the Huns in their wars against Byzantium and the Goths. Moreover, this would explain the ‘disappearance’ of the Ants in the 7th century in the simplest possible terms: the Ants did not disappear; they simply ceased to be ‘anda’ allies of the steppe peoples – now no longer the Huns, but the Avars – and became their vassals. A very convincing theory; all that is needed is some evidence—any evidence at all—that the Huns spoke Mongolian. The second theory takes us back to the days before the Hun invasion, when the Slavs lived alongside Scythian-Sarmatian tribes—who spoke an Iranian language—on the banks of the Dnieper. In Indo-Iranian dialects, ‘ant’ means ‘the outermost’, ‘one living on the edge’ – a ‘Ukrainian’, so to speak. Allegedly, this is what the Scytho-Sarmatians called those who lived on the edge of their territories. Finally, the Slavic version interprets the ‘ant’ found in Roman sources as a rendering of a Slavic word meaning ‘highest, best, eldest’. Later, it was pronounced as ‘vyashchiy’, but originally it must have sounded like ‘venchiy’ or ‘vanchiy’. This is also said to be the origin of the ‘Veneti’. The Khazars transcribe the name of the Slavic people, the Vyatichi, as ‘vantit’. I find it difficult to choose between these versions and leave it to the reader to decide.

16

The farsang was a unit of length used in the medieval East; unfortunately, it varied too frequently to be reliably and unambiguously converted into the metric system.

17

I would remind the reader that Spain in those times was under the rule of the Muslim emirs of Córdoba.

18

Reading Arabic manuscripts, especially medieval ones, is no easy task. The correct reading of a particular character may depend on the slightest flourish, a dot, the position of the character within a word, and almost on the position of the word within a sentence – and that is when we are talking about Arabic words proper. When, however, the Arabs set about rendering foreign names and titles… Al-Masudi lists the Slavic peoples of Europe:

'Next comes the Slavic tribe of Astabrana (variants: Astabvana, Astarana, Vastarana or Vastaraya. – O.V.), whose king is currently called Saklaikh (variants: Saklaij, Sadlaij, Sakla, Saklandzh. – O.V.); another tribe called the Dulaba (variants: Dulana, Dlavana, Dulaya. – O.V.), whose king is called Vanj-Slava (Vanj-Alaf, Vanj, Vanjelak, Vahsla, Tala – these are all variants of the same name! – O.V.), then a tribe called the Bamjin (Yamkhik, Mahas, Nabajin, Nabgir, Namjin. – O.V.), and their king is called Azana (Garan, Araba, Arata, Ara, Garata. – O.V.)'. That's enough, I suppose. Well, 'Dulaba' and 'Vandz-Slava' are still fairly easy to decipher – these are the Dulebs (though it's unclear which ones – those from the Carpathian region or the Czech ones), with Prince Vyacheslav. But the rest: what a torment!

19

In general, many peoples attribute the names of ancient tribes that lived alongside their ancestors to such mythical giants. Yet their heroic stature was often irrelevant – it is unlikely that the Ugric-Magyars really impressed the French so much with their height, nor the Huns the Germans, nor the Obry-Avars the Poles. Rather, it was a matter of the might and danger of the entire tribe, of the respect, fear and sometimes hatred it inspired in its neighbours, forcing them to see in them not so much people as the embodiment of a fearsome force of nature. Incidentally, the Russian word ‘ispolin’ also comes from this same list and is believed to derive from the name of the Scythian tribe
‘Spalov’.

20

I recently came across a claim that the Slavs borrowed patronymics from the Scandinavians. I am pleased to report that the first Slavic patronymic was recorded by the Byzantine historian Menander as early as the 6th century, at a time when the Danube and Dnieper Slavs had never even heard of any Scandinavians.

21

‘Meltei’ is one of the Armenian names for a snake; as for the word ‘Shchek’, Marr linked it to the Old Russian ‘shchekotat’ – ‘to whistle’, ‘to hiss’.

22

It is interesting to note that other contemporary researchers are following in the footsteps of the Novgorod chroniclers. V.V. Kozhinov attempts to substantiate the idea that Kyi lived and reigned at the end of the 8th century. But how, then, could Zenobius Glaccus have known so much about him in advance? That said, Kozhinov at least recognises Kyi as a Slavic prince, rather than a literary mirage or a foreigner, as some of his colleagues do.

23

Unless, of course, his nickname derives from a shepherd – a ‘kozary’ – or the bird known as a ‘kazarka’ (recall the two Solovyovs from the epic tales – the Bandit and Budimirovich – and their namesake Kazarin, the bogatyr Mikhail Potyka, also known as ‘Ptakh’).

24

Kosherishche – from ‘kosher’, a Jewish word denoting that which is ritually pure, righteous; in short, Jewish, as opposed to ‘tref’ – that which is impure, vile, or foreign. A detailed account of this epic, which reflects the conflict between the Rus’ and the Khazars, is included in my book *Svyatoslav*.

25

Another ‘chess-related’ piece of evidence for the Rus’ people’s direct connection with India – and the lack of such a connection among the Scandinavians – is the rook. In the West, including amongst the Normans, this piece represents a tower (‘tura’), whilst the Rus’ interpretation is a clear reinterpretation of the Indian ‘rathi’ – the chariot. The wheels were evidently taken to be shields on the sides, and the horse at the front – a figurehead.

26

The degree of ‘lightness’ can be determined by the fact that the root ‘ulbors’ is transformed into ‘Holmfors’ through five (!) phonetic changes, and the Scandinavian root ‘fors’, which, apart from its primary meaning – a current, a rapid – has come to denote a threshold, also manages to transform itself within a single paragraph into ‘-bors’, ‘-far’ and ‘-foros’. Using such methods, one can strip any meaning from any word.

27

Alas, this is quite a common occurrence. Of the fifty-one books written by al-Masudi's contemporary, Constantine the Purple-Born, only two have survived. What libraries have simply not reached us, and how much priceless knowledge has vanished without a trace into the abyss of time?!

28

At times, al-Masudi, relying on his informants, would come out with even more preposterous claims: for instance, whilst listing the Slavic peoples and their rulers, he mentions Dira (al-Dir) and Oleg (al-Olvang) as if they were still alive, whereas by the time al-Masudi wrote his work, both rulers had been resting from their earthly labours in the depths of their burial mounds for well over a decade. Information which, as the unforgettable barman from Bulgakov's *Variety*, Andrei Fokich Sokov, would undoubtedly have put it, is of the second – if indeed the second! – order of freshness.

29

Let me remind you – the Scandinavians, who, according to the Normanist dogma, the Rus' of the early 10th century must have been, did not fight on horseback even in the 14th century – neither well nor badly, not at all! And there was no room for horses on their drakkars. On the other hand, there was room on the ships of the Wends and the Baltic Slavs.

In fact, the Norse sagas ‘refuse’ to identify Olga as the Scandinavian ‘Helga’, rendering her name as the unwieldy ‘Allogia’. S.A. Gedeonov points to the existence of the names Oleg and Olga among the Czechs, as well as Slavic names such as Olgost, and the Lithuanian names Olgerd and Olgimunt. However, it is most likely much simpler than that – Lomonosov, and later Kostomarov, pointed out that these names arise quite naturally according to the same principle as other Russian verb-derived names ending in ‘O’ – Oshchera, Ovid, Olstyn, Olisava. O-leg – one who ‘lightened the burden’, ‘liberated’ – the Oleg of the chronicles liberates the Slavs from the Khazars and imposes upon them
‘a light tribute’. The Old Russian verb ‘olgtchiti’ means ‘to liberate’, ‘to show mercy’, etc. From this also come ‘light’, ‘concession’,
‘spare’, the ancient ‘lyzno’ and the modern ‘ne-lyzno’. To what extent must one be numbed by the intoxication of Normanism to derive this name-epithet—which so blatantly proclaims its Slavic origin—from the overseas ‘helgi’, even in defiance of the evidence from the Scandinavian sagas!

31

I would not wish to offend anyone unnecessarily, but the Jew and Normanist S. Shekhtor, who ‘discovered’ (?) the ‘document’, fulfils at least half of these criteria.

32

As you can easily see, there are no Normans on this list.

33

It is worth noting that the axe does not appear in the list of weapons, but in the list of tools. Unlike the Normans with their beloved battle-axes, the Rus' did not particularly favour battle-axes: the bylinas make no mention of them at all, whilst in the chronicles a noble Rus' uses an axe only for hunting and when suppressing a rebellion by rebellious tributaries.

34

The ‘magicians’ in this context are Zoroastrian priests, whose sacred fires were well known to every Azerbaijani in Nizami’s time.

35

Incidentally, the nickname ‘old’ also speaks volumes. In an age when everyone practised ancestor worship and the golden age was firmly situated in the past, the word ‘old’ had a completely different meaning. ‘Old’ did not mean ‘dilapidated’, ‘decrepit’ and certainly not
‘bad’ or ‘outdated’. ‘Old’ meant ‘the best’ – recall
‘the old Cossack Ilya Muromets’, or the chronicle’s ‘old smoke’ – a synonym
‘the finest generation’, corresponding, in turn, to ‘the finest people’ of later times.

36

I examine the true background to these events in my book *Sviatoslav*.

37

But perhaps they had taken some oil with them – was it not oil that fuelled the ‘firebirds’ which soon soared above the wooden walls of Iskorosten?

38

Could this have been the result of experiments in making ‘Greek fire’?

39

The story of Prince Oleg – ‘Alligiko’ – is also recounted in the Adyghe legends recorded by Sh. B. Nogmov. However, in these accounts, after being captured and taken across the sea, he finds himself a prisoner in ‘Sarkal’ – Sarkel. Evidently, this is how the memory of the prince’s capture by the Khazars was reflected in Adyghe legends. In the legend, his ally turns out to be a Tatar khan – clearly a reference to the alliance between Oleg ‘Gorislavich’ and the Polovtsians.

40

Illiterate Russian peasants continued to use pictograms well into the 20th century, whilst in the 10th century, in pagan Novgorod, a certain swordsman named Poltets, having carved an inscription on a wooden tag (there it is—writing carved into pieces of wood!), was forced to add to it, for the illiterate, a symbol of his rank – a sword and the princely emblem – to mark his service to the prince.

41

Balda might simply have been called Balda – many names and nicknames of the Rus' and Slavs were no more melodious. We are free to remember the Svyatoslavs and Ratiborovs, but the chronicles and ancient charters also preserve the memory of the Olovyanets, Tupochels, Kochkars and others such as the Umoisyagrya, Pestokrad and Rozvaligorod.

42

In fact, Vladimir Svyatoslavich, who ruled in Kyiv on the Dnieper, is merely a namesake of Vladimir Vseslavich Krasnoe Solnyshko, the epic prince who ruled in Kyiv on the Danube, and there is no other connection between them, as will be shown in detail in one of my books.

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